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A psychodynamic perspective on the implementation of
shared leadership

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Abstract

A key debate within leadership research is whether leadership can be conceptualized as a specialized role occupied by individuals or as a shared influence process amongst all members of a group (Yukl, 2006). Since the mid-1990s some leadership scholars, as a counterpoint to the dominance of the former and using terms such as shared and distributed leadership, have attempted to elaborate new 'post-heroic' leadership models (Badaracco, 2001) of the latter, in which leadership is something that involves all group members. These new forms of leadership are often positioned as something that organizations can implement as part of an adaptive response to a rapidly changing world.

Despite a 50-year tradition of construing leadership as a group level construct, little attention has been paid in these emerging debates to the systems psychodynamic perspective. From this perspective there are grounds for suspecting that attempts to implement shared leadership may *compound* rather than ameliorate issues related to adaptive challenges (Huffington, James and Armstrong, 2004). This thesis engages with the shared and distributed leadership literatures and examines how a systems psychodynamic perspective can contribute not only to debates within these literatures but to the wider controversies in the leadership literature.

This thesis reports on the findings of a single, 18-month, longitudinal case study of a senior team whose managing director attempted to implement shared leadership. Using a clinical fieldwork methodology (Schein, 1987) in the systems psychodynamic tradition (Miller, 1993b; Miller and Rice, 1967), this study advances a number of contributions to theory. These include: findings that challenge existing approaches to conceptualizing leadership – shared or otherwise; the elucidation of complex unconscious team processes that are mobilized as a senior team undertakes adaptive work; and thirdly, a more sophisticated and theoretically robust conceptualization of leadership as a group level phenomenon.

Key words: shared leadership, distributed leadership, systems psychodynamics

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
List of Tables.....	ix
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION	1
A key controversy within leadership studies.....	2
Shared and distributed leadership positioned as adaptive responses.....	4
Shared leadership and the systems psychodynamic tradition.....	5
Some basic systems psychodynamic concepts	7
Systems psychodynamics, adaptive work and shared leadership	9
The gap in the literature	10
Research focus	13
Thesis structure	15
Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	20
Literature Review	21
Introduction	21
(i) The suspect utility of leadership theory.....	21
(ii) The attraction to individual ‘heroic’ accounts of leadership.....	22
The dominant leadership paradigm.....	23
Entity-based leadership theories	24
(i) The way the self is theorized	25
(ii) How relational dynamics are understood.....	26
(iii) How process can be engaged with.....	28
Entity and constructionist approaches summarized	29
The gap in the literature	29

The shared and distributed leadership literature.....	31
Literature Review Methodology	34
Theoretical antecedents of shared leadership	36
Empirical studies in shared leadership.....	39
Three empirical studies employing social network analysis.....	45
Conceptual models from the team-based shared leadership literature.....	53
The Self-Leadership and Superleadership constructs	54
Shared Leadership in New Product Development (NPD) teams.....	59
A model of shared cognition in enabling shared leadership to emerge	61
A group exchange structure approach to leadership in groups	63
Shared leadership in work teams: A social network approach.....	67
Shared leadership and the self-in-relation	71
The theoretical antecedents of distributed leadership	76
(i) The work of Cecil Gibb	77
(ii) Social constructionism.....	77
(iii) Activity theory	78
(iv) Distributed cognition	79
The education-based distributed leadership literature.....	80
Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis	81
A new division of labour	82
Concertive action	83
Synergy and reciprocal influence.....	84
Formal and informal synergy	86
(i) <i>Cross-hierarchy</i>	86
(ii) <i>Trusteeship</i>.....	87
(iii) <i>Parity of relations</i>.....	87

(iv) <i>Separation of powers</i>	87
Analysis of Gronn's model of distributed leadership.....	87
The Distributed Leadership Project at Northwestern University	90
Research Methods in the distributed leadership study in schools	93
Research questions in the distributed leadership study.....	94
Affective dynamics in distributed leadership.....	95
A focus on the pragmatics of improving leadership practices	97
The gap in the shared and distributed literature	100
The research focus of this study	104
Group dynamics in the systems psychodynamic tradition	106
Chapter 3 SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORY	108
The Historical Roots of the Systems Psychodynamic Perspective	109
The self within the system psychodynamic tradition	112
Object Relations and the self defined through relationships.....	113
The unconscious and intra-psychic functioning	114
Splitting, projection and defenses against anxiety.....	114
Containment and shared leadership	117
Relational dynamics from a system psychodynamic perspective.....	118
The embodied self	119
Relational dynamics and unconscious recruitment.....	120
Transference and counter-transference in relational dynamics	121
The self-in-role	122
The group-as-a-whole.....	124
Boundaries, primary task and primary risk.....	127
Social defenses against anxiety	128
Adaptive versus technical challenges – the work of Heifetz	129

Engaging with process from a systems psychodynamic perspective	132
Chapter 4 METHODOLOGY, DESIGN AND METHODS	136
Methodology, design and methods	137
Introduction	137
System psychodynamics and a clinical perspective on fieldwork	140
Descriptive, explanatory and interpretive levels of data analysis	145
The kind of data to be collected to address the research questions	147
Research design and methods.....	151
Introduction	151
Choice of case study research.....	152
Choice of this research site and the processes of data collection	154
The Company – Recco.....	154
A longitudinal study - February 2008 – December 2009	160
Data collection process using clinical fieldwork from the systems psychodynamic approach	161
Approach to Data Analysis based on clinical fieldwork from the systems psychodynamic approach	167
Data Synthesis.....	168
The ‘Strands’ of data identified	174
Chapter 5 DESCRIPTIVE AND EXPLANATORY DATA ANALYSIS	181
Introduction	182
What data is included and what is left out?	186
Strand 1: Strategic Projects.....	189
Project Brief.....	191
Strand 2: Career Paths	212
Strand 3: Strategic Priorities.....	235

Strand 4: Senior team decision-making	263
March 2009 – October 2009 (8 months)	263
Chapter 6 INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS	292
Introduction	293
Strand 1: Strategy Projects.....	296
Descriptive data summary	296
An interpretive analysis of the strategic projects strand	297
Strand 2: Career Paths	304
Descriptive data summary	304
An interpretive analysis of the Career Paths strand	305
Strand 3: Strategic Priorities.....	313
Descriptive data summary	313
An interpretive analysis of the Strategic Priorities strand	314
Meta-level analysis.....	333
Conclusions	337
Chapter 7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	338
REFERENCES	387
APPENDICES.....	412
Appendix A.....	413

List of Tables

Table 1: Phases of work with senior team July 2006 - December 2010.....	159
Table 2: Quantitative and Descriptive Details of Research Data (Feb 2008 – Dec 2009).....	165
Table 3: Company documents used as sources of data	166
Table 4: The Programme Management Group: The Gantt Chart July 2009	177
Table 5: First Coding of data into ‘strands’	179
Table 6: Phases of work with senior team July 2006 - December 2010.....	185
Table 7: Time lines of the four data strands	188
Table 8: The Strategic Projects and their sponsors	190
Table 9: Strategic Projects: Summary of Descriptive Data.....	211
Table 10: Career Paths: Summary of Descriptive data	234
Table 11: Strategic Priorities: Summary of Descriptive data	261
Table 12: Senior team decision-making: Summary of Descriptive data	291

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A key controversy within leadership studies

A key controversy within leadership studies is whether leadership can be conceptualized as a specialized role occupied by individuals or as a shared influence process amongst all members of a group (Yukl, 2006). Some scholars have addressed the controversy by focussing on the limitations of the ontological assumptions that underpin the former (Drath, McCauley, Palus, Van Velsor, O'Connor and McGuire, 2008; Uhl-Bien, 2006) while other scholars have proposed new models of leadership that emphasize the latter – leadership as a shared group process (Pearce and Sims, 2002; Gronn, 2002). Despite some overlap these critiques have remained largely separate. This study integrates both by exploring debates about leadership ontology using a study of a post-heroic leadership model (Badaracco, 2001) referred to in the literature as 'shared leadership'.

Drath et al. (2008) suggest that, despite the apparent diversity of leadership studies, the field is unified by a commitment to an underlying ontology 'that is virtually beyond question within the field' (ibid. p.635). This ontology is exemplified by a view in which leadership consists of a 'tripod' of leaders, followers and common goals (Bennis, 2007). This, Drath and his colleagues suggest, is not a definition of leadership but something more fundamental – a commitment to an entity-based view of individuals and organisations, an atomistic world view (Chia, 2003) in which the stable regularities of causality between entities can be ascertained (Donaldson, 2003).

Since the mid-1990s a number of scholars using terms such as collective, concurrent, collaborative, dispersed, shared or distributed leadership have proposed new models of leadership seen as a group level influence process. Of the various terms in use, it is shared and distributed leadership that have come to the fore (Bolden, 2011). This study focusses on shared leadership in a team rather than distributed leadership at all levels of an organisation. The use of the term 'shared leadership' thus reflects the usage of these terms in the literature.

Many scholars writing about these new forms of leadership have not, however, examined the ontological assumptions on which their descriptions are based. There is much to be gained by doing so. Considerably more depth of insight can be gained from exploring these new models of leadership if ontological debates that lie at the heart of how leadership is construed are engaged with. These debates, taken up in more detail in the literature review in chapter 2, consider issues such as the way the self is theorized, how relational dynamics are understood and how process can be engaged with.

Integrating an exploration of these new models of leadership – focussing on shared and distributed leadership – *and* considering the ontological assumptions that underpin them, provides an opportunity to contribute to important debates not only to scholarly work in the field of shared and distributed leadership but also to wider debates in the leadership literature.

Shared and distributed leadership positioned as adaptive responses

An important aspect of these new models is that they are positioned as an adaptive response to a changing world – this is particularly the case with writers who describe models of shared leadership. When I first came across the shared leadership literature, emerging from the team-based literature on self managed teams in the mid-1990s, I was struck by two things: one is that it claims to be empirically driven – because the world is changing so rapidly the workplace is more complex and ambiguous and no single leader can provide leadership – it must be shared (Pearce and Conger, 2003); the second is that it seems that the literature is upbeat and normative. Shared leadership is emerging and we should study this emergence and then learn how to implement it. Empirical evidence for the emergence of shared leadership suggests it is the result of an adaptive response to a changing environment – to adaptive challenges (Heifetz and Laurie, 1999, 1997); shared leadership can, therefore, help us solve our problems. That was the story.

The story related to the distributed leadership literature that developed within the schools sector, was similar. The adaptive response is described in the shared leadership literature as one in which challenging global markets, competition, new technology, deregulation and the rise of knowledge workers (Pearce and Sims, 2002; Avolio, Jung, Murry and Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Barry, 1991) have led to flatter organizational structures and the widespread use of self-managed teams within which shared leadership is the most appropriate form of leadership.

Leadership is no longer seen as the preserve of a formally appointed leader but of the team as a whole.

Shared leadership and the systems psychodynamic tradition

As I read these accounts, I noticed that there was little mention in the literature of the systems psychodynamic tradition in which leadership is always seen as a group level phenomenon and is always understood in relation to context. The omission seems particularly glaring, given that many studies within the team-based literature from which the shared leadership literature was to emerge refer to the work of researchers from the Tavistock Institute from which the systems psychodynamic tradition originates. For example, Cox and Sims (1996), two prominent authors in the shared leadership literature, cite studies by Rice (1955) and Trist, Susman and Brown (1977) – two seminal studies in the implementation of self-managed work teams in an Indian weaving mill and an American coalmine respectively. Both of these studies represent studies in the systems psychodynamic tradition. Similarly, Neck, Stewart and Manz (1996) refer to the same study by Trist et al. (1977) and, importantly, a conceptual paper by Wells (1985) on the ‘group-as-a-whole’ perspective. This latter paper is well known within the systems psychodynamic tradition. It was clear that while these authors were citing papers from this tradition, there was little understanding of the central ideas of the perspective. In particular, descriptions of group dynamics are denuded of their psychodynamic properties and rendered as purely rational group processes. In Pearce and Conger’s landmark book of edited papers on shared leadership in 2003, of the 1,181 references across all 14 chapters, there are only

three references to authors from this tradition, despite its conceptual resonance with much that the new field was aspiring to articulate. Similarly within the distributed leadership literature, there are a few references to authors from the psychodynamic tradition but no substantive engagement with the conceptual framework on which it is based.

I therefore became intrigued as to why it seemed so difficult for authors interested in studying leadership as a group level phenomenon to make links to a tradition in which leadership had been studied that way for over 50 years and for which there was an elaborate conceptual framework and accompanying fieldwork methodology. In addition, the positioning of shared and distributed leadership as adaptive responses to a changing world only strengthened the case for considering a systems psychodynamic perspective since no knowledge claims are made from this perspective that are not articulated in relation to the context in which an individual, team, or organization is operating (Gould, Stapley and Stein, 2001). Within the shared leadership literature, accounts of the adaptive response are limited to descriptions of flatter organisational structures and self-managed teams. This focus on elements of organisational structure represent entity-based accounts with little description of the adaptive processes that might be involved within a team and how they might link to the context in which the team was working.

Having been trained at the Tavistock Institute in London and participated as a programme director or small group consultant on over a hundred leadership programmes in the last 12 years, all based on concepts from the psychodynamic

tradition, and as a staff member on a number of international Group Relations conferences (Miller, 1989; Rice, 1965) – I knew that the process of implementing what this new literature was calling shared or distributed leadership could be a precarious one. In my experience, groups under pressure to learn adaptively often develop highly ambivalent relationships with formally appointed leaders; for example, a group may seek comfort from the distress engendered by adaptive work (Heifetz and Laurie, 1999, 1997) by looking for traditional leadership in the hope that the leader will tell them what to do. It occurred to me that a leader attempting to implement shared leadership at a moment when a group might yearn for more traditional top-down leadership might have a mixed response to such efforts. There seemed to be little in the literature referring to this. There will be a more comprehensive description of the systems psychodynamic perspective in chapter 3; however, a brief consideration pertinent to shared and distributed leadership is undertaken here.

Some basic systems psychodynamic concepts

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations was founded in 1946 with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Its purpose was to extend the pioneering work in social psychiatry carried out during the war by members of the Tavistock Clinic, into the task of peacetime social and economic re-construction. Over the next 20-30 years, a conceptual framework and an applied action research model combined to create broad based pragmatic theory based on what has come to be termed a 'systems psychodynamics model'. Systems psychodynamics refers to a broad

range of concepts covering a range of disciplines based on the social systems theories of Lewin (1950, 1947, 1946,) and relational forms of psychoanalysis, in particular the work of Melanie Klein (Klein, 1959, 1952, 1946). The integration of these theories led to a conceptual framework that links the inner psychological world of individuals to the systems in which they are working (Miller, 1999). More specifically, how the emotional needs of individuals and groups shape and are shaped by the processes, structures, and cultures of the social systems in which those individuals and groups are situated (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2010; Krantz, 2001; Miller, 1989). Such an approach resonates conceptually with the framing of shared and distributed leadership as responses to adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1994). This is unsurprising since the conceptual framework of Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz and Laurie (1999, 1997) has roots in the systems psychodynamic tradition.

Central to this notion of how the emotional lives of individuals and groups shape and are shaped by aspects of the social, cultural and political context, are assumptions about the way the self is theorized (Miller, 1993a; Klein, 1946). From a psychodynamic perspective, individual behaviour is construed not only as a function of individual psychologies but of systemic affect or systemic distress in human collectives (Rice, 1965; Miller and Rice, 1967; Miller, 1999).

The notion of systemic affect is linked to an assumption regarding the ubiquitous presence of anxiety in all human systems (Miller, 1993a; Klein, 1946), and the need to reduce the discomfort associated with it. Individuals and groups therefore mobilize 'social defenses' – an unconscious set of strategies – to ameliorate the turbulence engendered by anxiety; one such group dynamic – scapegoating – is

easily recognizable to managers in organizations. These unconscious group dynamics exert a powerful influence on the manifest behaviour of individuals and groups. Individual behaviour is therefore not taken at face value as a manifestation of individual personality but is also representative of wider system dynamics. A marketing director in conflict with a finance director can be understood inter-personally but additional insight can be gained by exploring the possibility that their conflict says something about the parts of the organization they represent and the relationship between those parts.

Systems psychodynamics, adaptive work and shared leadership

These assumptions from the systems psychodynamic perspective draw attention to aspects of the shared leadership 'story' not considered in the literature. The upbeat and normative tone of the literature pays little attention to the potential influence of unconscious group level dynamics that may prove inimical to the emergence or implementation of shared leadership. The work of Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz and Laurie (1999, 1997), which will be taken up in more detail in chapter 3, highlights the ways in which these unconscious group level dynamics may be present in such situations. 'Adaptive change is distressing for the people going through it' (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997, p.124). Their model of adaptive leadership work suggests that when an organization faces adaptive challenges, powerful group level or systemic distress can be engendered in the organization. Explicit within the literature on shared leadership is the notion that this adaptive work can be achieved through shared leadership. However, no empirical study or

conceptual framework in the shared leadership literature considers the possibility that adaptive work of this kind could lead to systemic distress.

The literature fails to pay attention to the possibility that implementing a shared leadership model may unsettle existing role relations within a team or organisation and *compound* rather than alleviate the systemic distress or affect associated with adaptive work (Huffington et al., 2004). In other words, the shift to shared leadership itself constitutes an additional layer of adaptive work.

The gap in the literature

One reason the literature pays so little attention to such issues is because shared leadership is described as the *outcome* of an adaptive response to external pressure, with little attention being paid to the challenges of the adaptive *process*.

This focus on outcomes rather than process arises because the shared leadership literature is, for the most part, based on assumptions that see the individual as an ontologically complete isolate – an entity. Entity-based leadership models struggle to theorize and engage with process in groups, thus pointing to a potential gap in the literature. When entity-based theories do engage with process they do so by taking a ‘snapshot’ at one point in time using survey methods and then another ‘snapshot’ at another point in time. What happens in between – what is usually referred to as *process* – is of suspect epistemic value within objectivist entity-based approaches (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

In a similar way, the distributed leadership literature that will be considered in depth in chapter 2, struggles to capture the potential affective group level dynamics – the systemic affect – that may undermine or sustain distributed leadership. Although deploying a research methodology that contrasts markedly with the entity-based approaches of the shared leadership literature, the main conceptual model of the distributed leadership literature focusses more on social constructionist approaches which consider the existence of a psychological self as ontologically suspect. So we have two literatures, one that theorizes the self as an entity – a mind without a body – and the other that questions the notion of a self beyond its social construction. I argue that these formulations lead to conceptualizations of shared and distributed leadership that not only fail to identify the possible risks entailed in implementing shared leadership in a team but are also epistemologically impaired in their capacity – in both entity and social constructionist approaches – to explore the complex systemic group dynamics that are set in play when a group or organizations faces an adaptive challenge.

The challenge is made explicit as Yukl states:

'viewing leadership in terms of reciprocal, recursive influence processes among multiple parties in a systems context is very different from studying unidirectional effects of a single leader on subordinates, and new research methods may be needed to describe and analyze the complex nature of leadership processes in social systems.'
(Yukl, 1998, p.459)

While leadership is construed as the uni-directional influence of a formally appointed leader on followers in pursuit of mutual goals, the methodological limitations of entity-based studies are obscured. The moment the definition of leadership is expanded, as the shared and distributed leadership literatures propose, then the level of relational complexity increases manifold. This requires a more process oriented research methodology able to explore the kinds of systemic affect that Heifetz (1994) suggests is associated with adaptive work. Hence this study employs a clinical fieldwork research methodology (Schein, 1987) in the systems psychodynamic tradition able to capture these group level dynamics. In this tradition, leadership has always been seen as an expanded construct – as a group level phenomenon – thus not necessitating any new definitions such as shared or distributed leadership. This study does not therefore attempt to define shared or distributed leadership but to substitute a systems psychodynamic perspective on leadership as a means of joining debates within these literatures and considering more generally leadership responses to adaptive challenges. When I use the term ‘shared leadership’ I am referring pragmatically to the intention that all team members take up their roles as leaders of the organization. The formally appointed leader hopes that the team members will not only ‘buy-in’ to the strategy but feel that it is theirs and act accordingly. The terms shared or distributed leadership are not in general use by managers and I assert that the impulse common among senior leaders for their teams as a whole to provide leadership represents the intention to implement shared leadership.

Research focus

Based on the gap identified in the literature review, this study addresses one main research question:

How can the study of an attempt to implement shared leadership in an executive team, using a systems psychodynamic perspective, contribute to our understanding of leadership responses to adaptive challenges?

This question is operationalized in two separate questions:

RQ1. How does an attempt to implement shared leadership affect the group dynamics within a senior team?

RQ2. How do team members relate these experiences to their perception of the tasks that the senior team is charged with achieving?

The main research question refers to shared rather than distributed leadership. The shared leadership construct referred to in the literature, focusses on the team while distributed leadership developed in the education sector, as the term is mainly used, considers leadership as a distributed practice across all levels of a school. These issues are taken up in Chapter 2. My use of shared rather than distributed leadership as a term reflects my focus on a single team rather than the whole organization and thus simply reflects its usage in the literature. From a systems psychodynamic perspective, the difference is less important since group

dynamics are always understood in context and thus by focussing on a senior team this will imply that much of what is going on organizationally will be manifest in complex dynamics within the team – this allows for a process oriented consideration of the adaptive response of the team to the external environment. My choice of a senior team is simply because the senior team is the team in an organization most likely to be involved in dealing with the adaptive challenges that the organization faces and thus approximates most closely the formulation in the literature of these new forms of leadership being an adaptive response to external pressures. I do not propose this study as an extension of the senior teams' literature.

This study makes four main contributions to the leadership literature: the limitations of entity-based conceptualizations of leadership are highlighted; a research methodology that conceptualizes leadership as a group level construct is deployed and related interpretive theory elaborated; rich descriptions of team member experiences of adaptive work are presented as well as accounts of how accounts of team process change over time; and how leadership can be associated with powerful unconscious group dynamics in contrast to rational entity-based accounts of leadership. This study also makes a number of specific contributions to issues raised within the shared leadership literature – all of which also resonate with issues in the wider leadership literature.

Thesis structure

Chapter 2 starts with a consideration of the ontological debates within the leadership literature and then links them to a review of shared and distributed leadership. The review identifies eight main empirical studies and six conceptual frameworks within the shared leadership literature, and examines the seminal work of two main theorists within the distributed leadership literature whose work has been taken up within Management and Organizational Studies literature. The review demonstrates the centrality of factors related broadly to 'the affective dimension' that encourage or inhibit the emergence or successful implementation of shared leadership as a team works adaptively. At the same time, the challenges and limitations of existing research methodologies for exploring such factors as group level phenomena are also highlighted. The review identifies a gap in the literature in which these ontological limitations that reflect the debates within the wider literature are integrated with the shared leadership literature. The study focusses on shared rather than distributed leadership. One main research question is identified, that is then operationalized into two related research questions that are conceptually based on the systems psychodynamic tradition.

Chapter 3 introduces the main conceptual framework of the systems psychodynamic tradition. Following a brief reference to its historical development, the outline is structured in line with three related issues around which the ontological debates central to the shared and distributed leadership literatures as well as the wider leadership literature are delineated. Hence a systems psychodynamic perspective on the self, how relational dynamics are

understood and how process can be engaged with, provide the background to a description of the clinical fieldwork methodology based on the systems psychodynamic tradition.

Chapter 4 describes the research methodology, design and methods used in this study. It begins with a description of a clinical fieldwork approach to research based on a systems psychodynamic perspective. As well as identifying the kinds of data that will need to be collected in order to address the two research questions, three levels of data analysis are described (Miles and Huberman, 1984): a descriptive level presented in the form of data 'strands' along with an explanatory level of data analysis that provides a provisional description of psychodynamic concepts associated with the identification of patterns of systemic affect embedded in these strands; lastly an interpretive level analysis links more comprehensively, data to systems psychodynamic theory as a means of addressing the main research question and its two operationalized derivatives. The chapter then describes the Research Design – the selection of a case study and the description of the process of site selection and engagement with the organization. An 18 month longitudinal study of a company called Recco is described, in which the Managing Director sets out to create a senior team with the express intention of addressing a number of adaptive challenges. This chapter describes the process of negotiation of the clinical fieldwork role in the context of consulting to the organization. Permission was granted by the Managing Director to pursue a research agenda while consulting to the organization, on the condition that the organization was disguised and where possible, job titles altered. The processes of data collection,

early synthesis and reduction are then described. The chapter outlines the process of applying a clinical fieldwork approach to data collection. It describes in detail the steps taken from experience working with the senior team to recording 'observational notes', making 'analytic memos' and taking 'theoretical notes' (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973) which form the main data for addressing the two operationalized research questions. From my analysis of this data, eight 'strands' of data are identified which describe patterns of systemic affect associated with the team's work on several tasks for which the term 'shared accountability' was used. Further synthesis of these eight strands led to the selection of four main strands for presentation.

Chapter 5 presents descriptive data in four 'strands'. Each strand has a title: 'strategic projects', 'strategic priorities', 'career paths' and 'senior-team decision making'. These titles reflect language used by team members and reflect the intention at this stage of data analysis to remain as close to the data as possible. Data are drawn from the minutes of senior team meetings, one-to-one meetings with the Managing Director and other senior team members, formal presentations and monthly briefing documents prepared by the senior team to be communicated to all staff members. The events described are consistently associated with patterns of systemic affect based on data, including my own experience and that of team members in role, and on patterns of behaviour and affect while working on a set of tasks for which the team considered it had shared accountability. Data are not collected based on observation but on the lived experience of working in proximity with the team engaged in its actual work. The four strands represent a

gradual escalation of the team's own capacity to reflect on its own behaviour, culminating in the final fourth strand which focusses on the team's analysis of its own functioning in relation to its shared accountability tasks. An explanatory analysis consisting of psychodynamic concepts associated with the identification of the strands is also presented.

Chapter 6 takes the descriptive data and explanatory analysis presented in the four strands in chapter 6 and applies systems psychodynamic theory to progress a set of interpretive level statements for each strand. These statements are provisional theories about the nature of the patterns of systemic affect – group dynamics – that are mobilized as the team works on its shared leadership or shared accountability tasks. Each interpretive statement, often described as a 'working hypothesis' or 'working note' (Miller, 1995) within the psychodynamic tradition, consists of one sentence that is then followed by several paragraphs of explanation. Usually such working hypotheses would be shared with the client for consideration and further elaboration. Across all the strands, 28 of these statements are articulated. They represent the point where data and theory are linked most strongly with the benefit of the perspective of time. Finally these 28 statements are taken and an analysis made that goes across all strands and articulates five meta-level interpretive statements about the psychodynamics of this attempt at shared leadership in the face of adaptive challenges.

Chapter 7 concludes this thesis by summarizing the contribution this study makes to theory, methodology and to practice. This chapter outlines the ways in which

the broader debates within leadership studies are addressed by this study as well as identifying a number of contributions to the shared leadership literature; implications for practice are also considered. In a final section the limitations of this study are considered as well as possible future directions for research. I also outline my own learning from having undertaken this PhD.

An appendix consisting of a short Case Description that outlines in more detail the industry context in which Recco operates is included at the end. Under a number of headings such as 'ownership', 'industry', 'culture', technology', a comprehensive description of the company is provided. This description provides important background, some of which is used for the interpretive level analysis of data.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

Introduction

This thesis focusses on central debates within leadership, explored through a study of adaptive work in a senior team in which the formal leader attempted to implement shared leadership. These debates relate to a set of ontological assumptions that have profound implications for how leadership can be conceptualized as well as for the research methodologies that can be deployed. I will briefly outline the nature of these debates since they are central to the shared and distributed leadership literatures reviewed here. I will start with two important points about the leadership literature.

(i) The suspect utility of leadership theory

Firstly, the utility of its main theoretical claims have been frequently questioned. Such concerns started as early as the late 50s. Bennis' comment that 'probably more has been written and less known about leadership than about any other topic in the behavioural sciences' (Bennis, 1959, p.259) is dismissive of the field, as is Mintzberg's later comment in the early 80s about leadership theories published in refereed journals:

'When I first looked at that literature in the mid-1960s, I was frankly appalled: traits pursued fruitlessly for decades, consideration and initiating structure being rediscovered in the research year after year, risky shifts that were eventually discredited, and so on. And what has changed since the 1960s? Every theory that has

since come into vogue – and I shall not name them for fear of losing all my friends – has for me fallen with a dull thud' (Mintzberg 1982, comments delivered in speech to a leadership symposium – cited in Rost 1991)

Meindl and Ehrlich (1987) pointed out that leadership is often ascribed to organizational events that are complex and may not have much to do with leadership. More recently some authors have doubted whether leadership can ever be defined (Grint, 2005a), that time has been spent perfecting the wrong construct (Pye, 2005) that leadership may not be a useful construct for study anyway (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003) or that its presence is an indicator of social pathology (Gemmil and Oakley, 1992). However, despite this, the volume of leadership studies has expanded exponentially (Grint, 1997).

(ii) The attraction to individual 'heroic' accounts of leadership

While Bennis (1959) opines that 'the dialectic and reversals of emphases in this area very nearly rival the tortuous twists and turns of child-rearing practices' (p. 19), he himself demonstrates that these reversals of emphasis can occur not just *between* members of a scholarly community but may apply to individual scholars. In 1997 he co-authored a book (Bennis and Beiderman, 1997) entitled 'Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration' in which he openly eschews the focus on heroic leaders:

'Our contemporary views of leadership are entwined with our notions of heroism, so much so that the distinction between 'leader' and 'hero' (or "celebrity," for that matter) is too often seen as an inherently individual phenomenon' (ibid. p.1)

'Organizing Genius' was a book dedicated to extolling the virtues of collaborative teamwork as a counterpoint to heroic leadership. However, in 2002 he returned with a *Harvard Business Review* article (Bennis and Thomas, 2002) on transformational leadership entitled, 'Crucibles of Leadership'. In it Bennis and his co-author describe a set of four essential skills that individual leaders must have to transform their organizations; these are:

- 1) the ability to engage others in shared meaning;
- 2) a distinctive and compelling voice;
- 3) a sense of integrity (including a strong set of values);
- 4) 'adaptive capacity'

They describe adaptive capacity as by far the most important. They suggest that the capacity to endure and transcend adversity is an essential skill for which they propose 'youthfulness' or 'neoteny' is a central component. They offer descriptions of well-known CEOs' sporting activities, despite advanced age, as evidence to support their argument. The idealized, vigorous, superhero leader was back.

The dominant leadership paradigm

This draw to individualized accounts of leadership to which Bennis succumbed, is reflected in the dominant research paradigm of the field. For, despite the

appearance of diversity – a plethora of theories – the leadership studies literature is unified by a dominant leadership ontology consisting of leaders, followers and mutual goals (Drath et al., 2008). Drath and his colleagues suggest that this is more than a theory of leadership; ‘it is an expression of commitment to the entities (leaders, followers, common goals) that are essential and indispensable to leadership and about which any theory of leadership must therefore speak’ (ibid. p.635). These authors claim that this entity-based view of leadership is ‘virtually beyond question within the field’ (ibid. p.635). The questioning of the utility of leadership theory is no less a questioning of this dominant entity-based approach to leadership (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). First I will consider in more detail what is meant by entity-based theories. These theories will be considered at several points in the review of the shared leadership literature later in this chapter.

Entity-based leadership theories

Uhl-Bien (2006) contrasts entity-based theories of leadership with social constructionist perspectives. Three related issues illustrate how these two perspectives on leadership differ: the way the self is theorized, approaches to understanding relational dynamics, and how process can be engaged with. Exploring these three issues will highlight some of the central debates within leadership studies related to ontology. They are also central to the way in which both shared and distributed leadership have been conceptualized.

(i) The way the self is theorized

From an entity-based perspective, the self is theorized as ontologically complete to the extent that the individual consists of a discrete 'knowing mind' to which the individual has access. As Uhl-Bien points out, such a view 'is consistent with an epistemology of objective truth and a Cartesian dogma of a clear separation between mind and nature' (Uhl-Bien 2006, p.655). Leaders are theorized as heads without bodies (Ladkin, 2009).

Entity-based theories of the self reflect a commitment to objectivist knowledge claims. The self is theorized this way because it supports research methodologies intent on producing forms of knowledge that are measurable, codified and generalizable in particular ways. These universalist knowledge claims require the individual to be theorized as a separate and discrete knowing mind that can be interrogated using survey methods and then analyzed for measures of covariance.

In contrast, constructionist approaches consider the individual experience of selfhood as largely a social construction with the notion of an inner psychological core as being ontologically suspect (Gergen, 2009). Instead the emphasis is on the ways in which meaning emerges from social interactions between individuals in various social, cultural and political contexts (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Thus the focus is less on the strategies and intentions of knowing minds but more on the social processes that lead to leadership being attributed. Drath describes this social constructionist perspective on leadership in his book 'The Deep Blue Sea: Rethinking the source of leadership' (Drath, 2001).

'If, when encountering certain thoughts, words, or actions, we don't in effect say "that's leadership," then leadership simply isn't what is happening at the moment as far as we are concerned. So in the view being offered here, leadership is not something out there in the world that we come to know because it impresses itself on our minds, it is something we create with our minds by agreeing with other people that these thoughts, words, and actions – and not some others – will be known as leadership.' (Drath, 2001, pp.4-5)

Rather than a discrete stable variable 'out there' in an objective reality, leadership is leadership when people agree that it is – a social construction. These two perspectives have radical implications for how relational dynamics are understood.

(ii) How relational dynamics are understood

If individuals are construed as discrete self-isolates then how do we understand the relationship between individuals in a group? What kinds of leadership theories can be elucidated based on these relational dynamics? The term 'relational dynamics' refers to how individuals relate in a group setting – not just inter-personal dynamics which would refer to dyads.

The term means something different from an entity-based, social constructionist and, as I outline in chapter 3, a systems psychodynamic perspective. Within the objectivist paradigm, leaders as individual discrete entities interact with followers – other entities – for the purposes of influence, exchange and mutual goal

achievement (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Some of these interactions will be more or less effective. Leadership theories from this perspective set out to identify the influence strategies that produce desired outcomes. To do this, entity-based theories assume that relationships so construed have qualities that can be discretely identified and operationalized and thus measured. These relational sub-categories – behaviours or particular ‘styles’ – are thus themselves entities that are considered stable over time and are thus discoverable and predictable.

The focus is on the minds of individuals – to determine their cognitions, intentions and strategies in the context of inter-personal relationships and the pursuit of common goals. Quantitative techniques and statistical analyses are applied to identify patterns of covariance between variables. These are then codified into a prescribed set of skills and competencies that can be deployed through training programmes and other related Human Resource based initiatives.

In contrast, a social constructionist perspective on relational dynamics privileges the interactions from which meanings and attributions are constantly emerging. This reflects a central social constructionist view of organizations as processual rather than fixed entities (Chia, 2003) – of organizing rather than organization. The emphasis is thus on leadership processes rather than leaders (Pye, 2005). Leadership processes are those in which, according to Hosking (1988)

‘Influential “acts of organizing” contribute to the structuring of interactions and relationships, activities and sentiments; processes in which definitions of social order are negotiated, found acceptable, implemented and re-negotiated.’ (ibid. p.147)

Relational dynamics are therefore constitutive of and are constituted by leadership processes. To explore the nature of leadership from a social constructionist perspective, it is necessary to explore the social processes by which leadership comes to be known as such. This touches on the third issue to be addressed here – how process can be engaged with.

(iii) How process can be engaged with

The leadership studies literature is dominated by an objectivist paradigm sustained by a commitment to the individual construed as a discrete mind entity that strategizes and pursues relationships with others to achieve goals. Such an approach considers process to be of questionable epistemic value (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Entity-based approaches, when they do engage with process, do so by using survey methods to measure variables at two points in time – what happens in between those two points would require research methodologies incompatible with the dominant leadership ontology.

Social constructionist approaches to leadership engage with process in order to discern how individuals make meaning of the ongoing social interactions of individuals in organizational contexts. Meanings are context driven – that is embedded within unique social, political and cultural contexts that can only be understood by entering into the places where social actors work and understanding how they construct their worlds (Dachler and Hosking, 1995; Hosking, 1988).

Entity and constructionist approaches summarized

These two approaches highlight contrasting accounts of leadership. One focusses on individual leaders and how they influence followers to produce organizational outcomes, while the other focusses on meaning making in social processes and how change and social structure, including leadership itself, emerge out of the flow of this social interaction (Uhl-Bien, 2006). They both have contrasting views of relational dynamics – one sees relationships engaged in the pursuit of influencing strategies while the other focusses on the flow of social interaction between individuals. Similarly, both perspectives have strongly contrasting views of the individual – one seeing the individual as a mind-entity that can be interrogated through survey methods, while the constructionist approaches consider the notion of a separate self to be over-determined and focus instead on interactions *between* social actors. Entity-based approaches lend themselves to quantitative analysis while constructionist approaches rely on qualitative methods such as ethnography (Van Maanen, 2011; Watson, 2011). How will these major debates, in terms of how leadership can be conceptualized, be manifest in theories of shared and distributed leadership? The former is largely theorized within the shared leadership literature from an entity-based approach, while the main distributed leadership theories are elaborated mainly from a constructionist perspective.

The gap in the literature

The gap in the shared and distributed literature this review identifies focusses on the ontological assumptions that underpin the main constructs. It is not simply an account of *different* philosophical standpoints but one of inadequate

conceptualization of the key constructs – shared leadership and distributed leadership, particularly when considered as responses to adaptive challenges.

The first is theorized almost entirely from an entity-based perspective, the latter largely from a social constructionist view. I argue that the moment we step away from traditional heroic accounts of leadership to embrace notions of leadership as shared or distributed, the complexity of the relational dynamics involved requires research methodologies that neither entity-based nor social constructionist perspectives are equipped to deploy. Entity-based studies are limited in their capacity to theorize leadership as a group level phenomenon and unable to engage with the process oriented research required to capture data related to it; the social constructionist approaches reviewed here shy away from engaging with the affective dynamics set in play when shared leadership is implemented as a means to engage in adaptive work.

Paradoxically both literatures recognize the centrality of affective dynamics as ‘antecedent factors’ for the emergence or implementation of shared and distributed leadership. This review shows how, in study after study, the affective dimension is afforded considerable conceptual weight. And yet, because of ontological and epistemological commitments, researchers in both communities are limited in their capacity to engage with the more fine-grained dynamics of group life that would reveal what goes on when there is an attempt to share leadership. These limitations extend to theorizing of the adaptive response of which shared and distributed leadership are proposed as a part. Entity-based

theories limit descriptions of this adaptive response to the static elements of an organization such as structure and roles. The adaptive space in which organizations evolve these new leadership structures is under-theorized since key elements of the adaptive response can only be captured by a focus on processes in which adaptive work occurs (Heifetz and Laurie, 1999, 1997).

A systems psychodynamic perspective sees leadership as a group level phenomenon embedded within a particular context and is proposed because it has the conceptual richness to capture the data that both literatures acknowledge to be important but are constrained from exploring because of their ontological orientations. These arguments are considered in more depth and the gap in the literature more fully developed following a comprehensive review of the shared and distributed leadership.

The shared and distributed leadership literature

The structure of this review reflects the work of two distinct research communities; I will address them separately. Some of the earliest work on what was to become the shared leadership literature was done in the 1980s by the writing partnership of Manz and Sims. Their development of the Self-Leadership and Superleadership constructs (Manz and Sims, 2001, 1993, 1991, 1989, 1987, 1986) provided the conceptual ground for later work on shared leadership.

Charles Manz was the PhD student of 'Hank' Sims Jr. Craig Pearce, who went on to become the central figure in the development of the shared leadership construct, was in turn the PhD student of Charles Manz; these three researchers went on to

write in different configurations and have made a considerable contribution to the shared leadership literature (Pearce, Manz and Sims, 2009, 2008; Pearce and Manz, 2005; Pearce and Sims, 2002, 2000). In addition, Pearce was one of the editors of a landmark book of collected papers on shared leadership (Pearce and Conger, 2003) as well as the editor of a special issue of *Personnel Psychology* on shared leadership (Pearce, Hoch, Jeppesen and Wegge, 2010).

From the mid-1990s, shared leadership developed in the 'team-based' leadership literature centred around a group of US-based researchers using almost exclusively the term 'shared leadership' and focussing on the empirical study of shared leadership mainly as an *emergent* property of a team. This emergence is characterized as an adaptive response to a changing world (Heifetz, 1994). Some of the conceptual models developed in this field are also concerned with how shared leadership can be implemented but there are few empirical studies of implementation.

At around the same time, a group of researchers within the education literature began to focus on 'distributed leadership' with the school as a unit of analysis rather than the team. Although this research has been taken up widely with the school's sector in the UK, its conceptual origins lie with the work of Australian author Peter Gronn (2003, 2002) and empirically on the related work of Spillane (2006) based at Northwestern University in the US. Unlike the shared leadership literature, the distributed leadership literature is dominated by one main conceptual framework around which there are some elaborations. Research in the education sector is concerned with ways of developing leadership at all levels of a

school rather than focussing on the head teacher. Within this literature, distributed leadership is clearly distinguished from shared leadership. Prior to the publication of Gronn's (2002) paper proposing 'distributed leadership as a unit of analysis', these two research communities remained largely distinct with little or no cross-citation. The absence of debate between these literatures, despite strong commonalities in focus, means that differences between these research agendas, their underlying epistemologies and related research methodologies remained unarticulated (Fitzsimons, Turnbull James and Denyer, 2011). Yet despite their differences both are similar in two important ways – firstly they both emphasize the need for alternative approaches to leadership as an adaptive response to the changes in the external environment; secondly and as this review will show in some detail, 'it is clear we need a far more fine-grained understanding of how shared leadership unfolds within group and organizational settings' (Pearce and Conger, 2003, p.287).

This review shows that despite these similarities, both literatures' inadequate conceptualization of shared and distributed leadership rests on the way the self is theorized and how this in turn leads to an engagement with process that underplays the potential risks of implementing shared leadership as a response to adaptive challenges. The gap is thus based on a critique of the ontological and epistemological assumptions on which these two literatures rest and this critique reflects the debates in the wider leadership literature. Before considering these issues I outline the methodology used for this review.

Literature Review Methodology

Denyer and Tranfield (2009) propose that the methodology used for a literature review is related to the purpose of the review, the nature of the field being investigated, the kinds of texts to be synthesized and the time and resources available. For a PhD within the school of Management at Cranfield University, the scope of my literature review is a comprehensive coverage of both theoretical and empirical studies of shared and distributed leadership with the context of the Management and Organisational Studies (MOS) literature. This means that the searches are restricted to this domain and focus on databases readily available to the MOS community – EBSCO, Proquest and Web of Knowledge. Specialist databases within, for example, education and healthcare are not included. Studies from these fields are included only if they contribute to an understanding of shared and distributed leadership within the MOS literature. The main search terms are shared and distributed leadership. Studies that use the term shared leadership but refer to structural arrangements such as role sharing at the top of organisations rather than teams (Alvarez and Sjenova, 2005) are not included. A study by Currie, Lockett, and Suhomlinova, (2009) using the term distributed leadership is not included for the same reason. Particular studies using other terms such as collective leadership (Denis, Lamothe and Langley, 2001) are considered briefly in this review but are mostly excluded if they did not offer significant conceptual novelty or were not taken up by others and developed. For the former reason, Raelin's 'Leaderful' organizations (Raelin, 2003) and 'Power Up' by Bradford and Cohen (1998) are excluded while the 'X-teams' work of Ancona and Bresman (2007) is excluded for the latter.

Since it has been shown that for reviews which address complex questions, database searches may account for as little as 30% of the relevant articles (Greenhalgh and Peacock, 2005), my literature research has involved supplementing database searches with hand searching known journals and online resources including websites, as well as following up on recommendations from people working in the field. A cross-referencing and branching method proved to be the most effective for ensuring a comprehensive search was completed. At first I intended to include papers from the healthcare sector as I felt they were of sufficient volume to justify inclusion. However, with the exception of papers such as that of Denis et al. (2001) mentioned above, for the most part papers in this sector either lack academic rigour or are poorly and inconsistently conceptualized. Studies in this sector related to change management such as that of Buchanan, Addicot, Fitzgerald, Ferlie and Baeza (2007) although using the term distributed leadership are not relevant to this study's focus on the main conceptual frameworks of the shared and distributed leadership literatures. As this review will show, there is little agreement on what these terms mean and hence a real danger of incoherent fragmentation of the literature.

Before delving into the first of these two literatures – the shared leadership literature – in detail, I will first explore the various earlier studies that have been claimed to represent antecedents to the shared leadership construct. The distributed leadership literature will be considered after this.

Theoretical antecedents of shared leadership

Often cited within the literature and one point of departure, Follet's Law of the Situation (1924) states that leadership could stem from the individual with the most relevant skills in a particular situation. Less frequently cited but still important is the work of Benne and Sheats (1948) who suggest that leadership is not to do with an individual but with functions and that several individuals could take up differentiated roles in relation to these functions. Similarly Gibb (1954; 1969) argues that leadership is best thought of as existing on a continuum from focussed or individual leadership to a distributed pattern. Stogdill (1950) suggests that leadership is based on role differentiation related to influencing the goal setting and goal achievement behaviours of others. This definition 'does not specify how many leaders an organization shall have, nor whether the influence of an individual is continuous or intermittent.' (ibid., p. 3). Similarly, and often cited, is an empirical study by Bowers and Seashore (1966) indicating that leadership can come from peers and that this could have a positive impact on outcomes. Katz and Kahn (1978) espouse the potential competitive advantage that can accrue to an organization in which reciprocal influence is widely shared.

Hodgson, Levinson and Zaleznik's (1965) exploration of 'the executive role constellation' of three leaders of a hospital led to work on co-leadership (Heenan and Bennis, 1999), strategic leadership (Hambrick and Mason, 1984), and collaborative leadership (Denis, Langley and Cazale, 1996). In addition there were two studies of social movements in which traditional leadership structures did not emerge (Brown, 1989; Brown and Hosking, 1986). What all of these early

contributions have in common is that they propose a model of leadership in which leadership can come from other group members. Despite these notable exceptions, until recently there have been few papers that conceptualize leadership as emanating from multiple individuals.

Other antecedents of shared leadership can be seen in work that widens the concept of influence to all group members such as Social Exchange Theory (Festinger, 1954; Homans, 1958), and studies that explore subordinates' roles in decision making (Vroom and Yetton, 1973) and the concept of 'empowerment' (Blau and Alba, 1982; Conger and Kanungo, 1988). However, since empowerment is based on the demarcation of leaders and followers it can only be considered a prerequisite for the emergence of shared leadership (Pearce and Conger, 2003). Leader Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Graen, 1976) and Substitutes for Leadership (Kerr and Jermier, 1978) can also be included. It was this latter concept that was used by Manz (1980) to propose a model of 'self-management' as a substitute for leadership (Manz and Sims, 1987, 1986). Later developments in the Self-Leadership concept evolved into one of the main conceptual frameworks of shared leadership (Manz and Sims, 2001, 1993, 1991, 1989).

By making reference to the studies above, researchers can position shared leadership as an incremental contribution to the steady progress of scientific knowledge. Thus shared leadership can be positioned as a concept whose time has come; the world is changing and we are now discovering new concomitant emergent forms of leadership. This gives the impression that models of shared

leadership are empirically driven rather than theory driven. This conveniently sidesteps the more challenging question as to why researchers have been so preoccupied with 'heroic' individual models of leadership for so long. It suggests that the focus on hierarchical vertical leadership reflected the empirical realities of the day and in the same way that the world is currently changing, so new patterns of leadership are emerging.

In my own view, this story is too easy. Some scholars argue that these new notions of leadership are not new at all (Grint, 2005a; Western 2008).

Organizations such as the Quakers in the 17th Century, the anarchist movement of the 19th, as well as some modern protest and terrorist organizations all evolved forms of organization in which leadership was shared and distributed. Decades of focus on individual leaders has more to do with the epistemological priorities of the leadership research community than it has to do with the need to faithfully represent empirical reality. The leadership field has been dominated by a research paradigm whose objectivist central tenets place constraints on the type of research methodologies that can be deployed. If the only valid form of knowledge is universalist, codified and generalizable, then the individual research subject has to be defined in ways amenable to interrogation by survey methods which generate data from which such forms of knowledge can be elaborated. As I will argue, theoretical definitions of shared leadership in which the individual is defined as a discrete atomistic entity are problematic. This will firstly be taken up when I consider the empirical studies in the shared leadership literature below, followed by the conceptual frameworks in this new field. What emerges is a literature that

acknowledges the need for a focus on process – that the exploration of fine-grained team dynamics in teams is desirable – but is unable to carry out such studies because of methodological limitations.

Empirical studies in shared leadership

The team-based shared leadership literature traces its theoretical origins to a shift within the literature on self-managed teams in the mid-1990s. In a landmark volume of ‘Advances in Inter-disciplinary Studies of Work Teams’, a gap in what was then current thinking about self-managed teams was acknowledged. In the introduction the editors commented on how ‘it was but a short time ago that many practitioners believed teams and leadership were mutually exclusive’ and through trial and error, ‘we learned we could not ignore the need for leadership’ (Beyerlein, Johnson and Beyerlein, 1996). Of the eight main empirical studies of shared leadership, the first and most commonly cited empirical study within this literature – by Avolio and his colleagues – was published in this volume and can be considered as a starting point for the empirical study of shared leadership (Avolio et al., 1996).

In this first study, the authors set out to measure what kind of shared leadership – ‘transactional’ or ‘transformational’ – is associated with highly developed teams. Using a team level version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1995), the Team Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (TMLQ) is used to measure both transactional and transformational leadership styles at the team level. Line items are altered to ask respondents – in

this case, groups of undergraduates – how they rate the *team's* leadership rather than the leadership of a formally appointed leader. These measures are then correlated with team process measures of team cohesion, efficacy, trust and potency, in order to assess the degree of team development. The results indicate that highly developed teams had leadership within the team that was associated with descriptions of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) while less developed teams were correlated with leadership that has been described as transactional. Because the line items were altered to the team level, the leadership measures are said to correspond to *shared* transactional and *shared* transformational leadership.

Transformational shared leadership is positioned as the culmination of a team development process from 'non-transactional' to 'corrective transactional', then 'constructive transactional' and finally following a 'quantum leap' to transformational leadership at which shared leadership occurs in its highest form. Key to this evolution is a sense of a shared goal and a shared sense of purpose. The achievement of this goal and purpose becomes so central that team members are willing to subordinate their own needs to ensure the collective achieves what it has set out to do.

This study, although the first major study in the field, raises issues central to this review. Firstly, by associating team development with shared leadership, this study points to the potential importance of process measures for the emergence of shared leadership. As the authors say, 'one point is clear, we have barely begun to

examine one of the more important ingredients of group development – its leadership processes, shared or otherwise’ (Avolio et al., 1996, p.190). This is an important first study as it begins to highlight the importance of team processes, the level of team development and leadership.

However, based on studies of undergraduates, a number of weaknesses in this study can be outlined. The difficulty of working with undergraduates with little at stake, the problem of identifying the direction of causality, the idealization of higher stages of team development, and the lack of fine-grained detail of what is actually going on in these teams, are just some of the problems with this approach. The emergence of a group structure around leadership in groups artificially constructed for the purpose is not the same as that which may emerge within authentic teams. The only way these researchers engage with team process is to use a questionnaire designed for the purpose. Since data are collected at two points in time, we have little idea of what is going on in terms of process between those two points. In addition, while this provides the quantitative data required for measurements of covariance, aggregating line items from a questionnaire ostensibly constructed to measure transactional and transformational leadership at the *individual* leader level is problematic. While theorizing shared leadership as a group process, these entity-based studies are unable to conceptualize group behaviour as anything theoretically different from a group of separate individuals that happen to be working together. Line items that purport to measure discretely and consistently a construct called ‘transformational leadership’ in an individual are relied upon to do the same for a group. When authors in this tradition cite ‘the

group-as-a-whole' concept (Wells, 1985) they neglect to mention or are unaware that this is based on the assumption that a group is more than the sum of its parts. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter which explores systems psychodynamic theory in more depth.

Of the remaining seven studies, the next three (Pearce and Sims 2002; Pearce, Yoo and Alavi, 2004; Ensley, Hmieleski and Pearce, 2006) have strong similarities and so I will consider them together. Although based in different contexts – change management teams, virtual teams and new venture top teams respectively – they all use variations of the same leadership style questionnaire to measure shared leadership against team outcome measures. Building on that used by Avolio and colleagues in the first study, Pearce and Sims (2002) developed a questionnaire based on a more refined model of four leadership types: directive, transactional, transformational and empowering. Variations of this questionnaire were applied in all three studies.

In the first study of these three studies, Pearce and Sims (2002) a questionnaire was constructed that allowed for the discrimination of the relative influence of both traditional vertical leadership and shared leadership in 71 change management teams in a single organization. To do this, the same survey question would be framed in two alternative ways. For example, one of the line items designed to measure transformational leadership would read, 'my team leader allows performance to fall below minimum standards before trying to make improvements' and the shared leadership variation would read, 'my team

members allow performance to fall below minimum standards before trying to make improvements'. In addition, measures of team effectiveness were also taken and, unlike the earlier study by Avolio and colleagues, this measure included internal clients and the managers the teams reported into rather than just self-perceived measures of effectiveness. The results found that measures of both shared leadership and vertical leadership are highly significant predictors of team performance (Pearce and Sims, 2002, p.183).

The second of this trio of empirical studies that use the same leadership styles model (Pearce et al., 2004), similarly explores the relative influence of vertical versus shared leadership focussed on the non-profit sector. The 28 teams in this study were made up of social workers who were participants in an educational programme with an average team size of seven members. The same double response format was used with the same line item being asked in two ways – one for the individual leader and one for the group as a whole. The team outcome measures were potency, social integration, problem solving quality, and perceived effectiveness. The correlations strongly suggest a poor correspondence between traditional vertical leadership and team outcomes whereas shared leadership behaviours were shown to be a more useful predictor of team outcomes.

The final study in this group of empirical studies, that of Ensley et al. (2006), is one in which the sector focus was shifted from non-profit to new start-ups. Using a methodology similar to those used in the empirical studies considered so far, the study involved a survey of top teams in two samples: one of 66 top management

teams sampled from Inc. Magazine's list of America's 500 fastest growing start-ups, and a second sample of 154 top teams selected randomly from Dun and Bradstreet's database on new American-based entrepreneurial start-ups. In this case, while both shared and vertical leadership are positively correlated with new venture performance, shared leadership was considered 'particularly efficacious' as a predictor of new venture performance.

However, one of the findings in this study was puzzling to the authors. Unlike previous similar studies, this time the correlation between vertical transformational and vertical empowering leadership and team outcomes were not positive. They went on to suggest how this may be due to the particular nature of the new start-up top team in which individuals can be expected to be highly motivated, and that attempts at top-down transformational and empowering leadership may be construed as unnecessary at best and manipulation at worst. The authors further suggest that perhaps their results reflect the nature of new venture top teams that are most likely to be characterized by individuals who are willing and able to take responsibility for the achievement of collective goals.

Three of the four studies considered so far implicitly acknowledge the importance of process outcomes – in the first case, explicitly so (Avolio et al., 1996) in their study of phases of team development. Similarly, in a study of virtual teams in the public sector (Pearce et al., 2004) the outcome factors are related to behavioural processes. Their study looks at the relative contribution of shared versus vertical leadership to outcomes such as 'social integration' with line items such as, 'the

members of the team are always ready and willing to cooperate and help each other' or 'the members of the team get along well'. In the third and last of the series studied so far, the study of new venture senior teams, while the outcome measures are all 'hard' – increases in both revenue and employee headcount – the anomalous findings which suggest that transformational and empowering leadership are not correlated with these outcomes lead to a limited but revealing discussion of potential team dynamics in new venture contexts. However, this is a discussion which must remain limited since research methods that might explore in more fine-grained detail what actually happens in these teams where leadership is or is not being shared, are not deployed in these studies. The issue of how to engage in more fine-grained explorations is taken up in the next three empirical studies in the field, all of which employ a social network analysis approach.

Three empirical studies employing social network analysis

Mehra, Smith, Dixon and Robertson (2006) collected sociometric data from 28 field-based sales teams to explore how the network structure of leadership perceptions taken at the team level of analysis relates to team sales and team satisfaction. Respondents were not asked questions related to specific leadership constructs, as with previous studies, but were instead provided with a list of group members and asked to nominate those they felt provided leadership in the group. In keeping with a phenomenological view of leadership, in which a leader is someone recognized as such, the resultant patterns can distinguish groups in which there are as many leaders as group members.

Social network analysis provides the means by which both vertical patterns of social influence and lateral influence amongst peers can be modelled. Another advantage that social network analysis has over survey methods that aggregate team members' perceptions of influence, is that the pattern of leadership distribution using network analysis can be preserved and represented visually in various ways.

While previous studies have presented results that demonstrate the relative significance of shared leadership over traditional vertical leadership, this study fails to find support for the notion that the distribution of leadership is a better predictor of team performance than vertical leadership. Instead it finds that the critical issue is whether the various leaders – formal and emergent – acknowledge one another as such, and are willing and able to co-ordinate activities amongst themselves and other group members.

In this study, in teams within which multiple leaders did acknowledge one another, this was found to be associated with better team performance. When this was not the case, then associated team performance was poorer. The terms 'distributed co-ordinated network' and 'distributed fragmented networks' respectively, are coined to distinguish these two patterns of distributed leadership.

However, statistical analysis for covariance, while providing useful insights regarding the degree to which nominated leaders acknowledged one another, cannot capture the detail of much of what is actually going on in these teams in terms of group dynamics. For example, it is possible – and in my own experience I

have often seen – that while individual team members may hold a leader in positive regard, the collective dynamic is undermining of that very same leader – the group is not the sum of the individuals. Mehra et al claim that their findings suggest that theories of distributed or shared leadership ‘need to make more fine-grained distinctions between different types of distributed leadership if they are to explain meaningful variance in measures of team performance’ (ibid. p.241).

These early empirical studies are gradually evolving toward an acknowledgement of the need to explore not only the measurement of variance using quantitative measures but the importance of finding out more about what is actually happening during the processes that lead to shared leadership emerging or failing to emerge.

In the second empirical study in this review to employ social network analysis, Carson, Tesluk and Marrone (2007) define shared leadership as ‘an emergent team property that results from the distribution of leadership influence across multiple team members. It represents a condition of mutual influence embedded in the interactions among team members that can significantly improve team and organisational performance’ (Carson et al., p.1218). In this particular study the authors approach the challenge of capturing data involving mutual influence by using social network analysis. They focus on research questions related to the antecedent conditions – both external and internal to the team – that give rise to shared leadership as they define it. Internal factors referred to as ‘internal team environment’ include a ‘sense of shared purpose’, ‘social support’ and ‘voice’. External factors are said to be the level of external coaching support by an external manager which is considered as an antecedent factor leading to the emergence of

shared leadership. The authors theorize that these antecedent factors – shared purpose, social support and voice – are likely to lead to two sets of activities from which shared leadership will be realized. One is that team members must offer leadership and try to influence the formation of common goals, as well as create a supportive team culture. Secondly the team as a whole must be willing and able to accept leadership from more than one person.

The study sample involved 59 consulting teams made up of MBA students in teams ranging from four to seven members. Data were collected two thirds of the way through the projects from the teams, faculty supervisors and external clients. What distinguishes this study from its predecessors is its enhanced attention to the conceptualization of shared leadership as a relational phenomenon involving mutual influence. In particular, allowing individuals to make judgments about leadership influence based on their own implicit theory does lighten the degree of conceptual abstraction that occurs in studies centred around a preconceived leadership model based on observed behaviours. This study uses social network analysis to capture the whole pattern of leadership throughout a group. Such an approach emphasizes relationship as the unit of analysis not perception of observed specified behaviours. That shared leadership is construed as ‘embedded in the interactions among team members’ strongly suggests that a focus on process would be an appropriate area of focus.

The study is, however, limited to the sources of influence – single or multiple – rather than the quality of that influence. Using measures of network density – the

mean number of ties per group member – the authors claim the degree of distribution of leadership influence can be illustrated and analyzed. However, measures of network density are not the same as measures of network centralization (Small and Rentsch, 2010) that would measure distribution more clearly.

Despite the impressive conceptualization of shared leadership, such studies remain wedded to a deterministic view of leadership that assumes we can identify universal rules for shared leadership emergence and codify them into a set of best practice rules that can be disseminated across organizations in an unproblematic way. The authors in this case recommend that insights from their findings be used in training programmes to help teams form a ‘team charter’ around behaviours that will allow for the emergence of shared leadership.

Having spent a decade working with MBA groups and senior executive groups, work begins by exploring why the agreement to keep to such a charter has been broken – as it invariably will be – particularly who gets to break the rules and who does not. Such recommendations expose the rationalist underbelly of such research methods and by so doing also expose their limitations.

Finally, in this study there is a focus on variables such as ‘voice’ and ‘social support’ which are clearly related to relational dynamics but, because of methodological constraints, remain unarticulated beyond measures of covariance. Such methodologies are related to a view of the world populated by discrete entities and

in which affect can be understood by interrogating individual 'knowing minds' with survey methods. It is for this reason that, so far, shared leadership is conceptualized only as serial emergence – it is still something that individuals do, just in series. There is no conceptualization of shared leadership as a group level phenomenon – this theoretical impairment is a reflection of the entity-based assumptions of the self.

A third empirical study that employs social network analysis (Small and Rentsch, 2010) sets out to explore the correlation of measures of shared leadership with team outcomes – like so many of the studies considered so far. This study focusses on antecedent factors such as collectivism and trust and considers how they are correlated to measures of shared leadership and team outcomes. Their study is based on students ($n = 280$) on a business course with an average age of 22 who were placed in 60 groups with 4-5 members in each to work on a simulation. Team outcomes are measured by a basket of eight financial indicators and by a group of coaches trained to use the simulation that represented the task the groups were to work on. Coaches were to observe and assess the performance of the team in terms of questions such as 'how effective was the team in terms of setting goals and priorities?' Collectivism and Trust were measured using standard scales.

Their results suggest a positive correlation between shared leadership and team outcomes. In addition, the longitudinal aspect to their study finds that teams exhibit more shared leadership in the later stages of their work than at the beginning. Finally, their measures of trust and collectivism correlated positively

with team performance and therefore represent two potentially important antecedents to the emergence and maintenance of shared leadership.

Yet again we have a study that theorizes the presence of relational process oriented variables as central to the emergence of shared leadership or vice versa – causality is often difficult to establish in such empirical studies. Whether it is the importance of a shared sense of purposes and a shared goal to the evolving development of a team in the first empirical study considered (Avolio et al., 1996), the outcome measures of potency, social integration, and problem solving quality in teams in the non-profit sector (Pearce et al., 2004), or the collectivism and trust of this last study, it is clear that in the empirical studies within the shared leadership literature there is a close association theorized between the presence of shared leadership and these behavioural variables, all of which are related to human relational processes that will have a strong affective component. This can be highlighted by simply imagining their absence – a team without trust, a sense of the collective, voice, social support, social integration or shared purpose.

The final empirical study (Boies, Lvina and Martens, 2010) that will be considered addresses the potential influence of negative behaviours in groups for performance outcomes and also explores the construct of trust as an important antecedent to the emergence of shared leadership.

Using two contrasting leadership styles taken from Bass' (1985, 1990) Full Range Theory of Leadership – transformational leadership and passive avoidant leadership styles were employed. Forty-nine undergraduate teams with an

average age of 25.3 participating in a strategy simulation were the subjects of this study. The business simulation went on for a whole semester at the end of which the 49 teams were given the results and then asked to score their teams on style, potency and trust. The results showed a positive correlation between transformational leadership and team outcomes, and a negative one for avoidant passive leadership.

However, the behaviours that are said to represent a passive avoidant leadership style focus on the use of punishment and discipline and thus are based on individual rather than collective group level behaviours. Furthermore like all the studies considered so far, it is only surface manifested behaviours at the individual level that are considered and the purpose of the research is to determine how best practice behaviours can be identified for diffusion through training programmes. No study so far has presented an approach that allows for the observation of group level processes that are manifest within the ongoing flow of activity in teams as they work on their tasks.

Thus this review of the empirical studies reveals an acknowledgement of the need for process-based research to explore the more fine-grained dynamics of group life and an implicit focus on affective factors for the successful emergence or implementation of shared leadership. This review also shows the limitations of these entity-based approaches to both theorizing shared leadership as a group level construct and exploring processes in groups as leadership is shared. It also reveals that, despite positioning shared leadership in teams as part of an adaptive

response, these models do not theorize the ways in which team behaviours are part of a response to adaptive challenges.

Being able to study process in a team attempting to share leadership will, as the next chapter on systems psychodynamics shows, be particularly important when undertaking adaptive work, since such work is usually associated with systemic distress. The review of the conceptual frameworks considered below sheds more light on the nature of these issues and in particular the limitations of entity-based theories of shared leadership to adequately conceptualize a research methodology that could conceivably explore such dynamics.

Conceptual models from the team-based shared leadership literature

Having conducted a review of the main empirical papers in the team-based shared leadership literature, I will now cover the main conceptual models. The conceptual models are similar to the empirical papers to the extent that they advance the agenda for shared leadership based on a view that the business environment in which organizations operate is more challenging than before, forcing companies to adopt flatter structures of which teams are an integral part. (Pearce and Sims, 2002). Shared leadership is thus an adaptive response to externally driven challenges. They differ from the empirical papers to the extent that they are as concerned with the *implementation* of shared leadership as much as with its emergence. Importantly, they do allow for the clearer analysis of the ontological and epistemological assumptions on which much of this literature is based.

Ultimately, with the exception of one conceptual framework – the last to be considered – I argue that the philosophical stance on which the literature is based – that of an entity-based view of the individual – hampers attempts to render a convincing conceptualization of shared leadership as a group phenomenon.

The Self-Leadership and Superleadership constructs

In the title of their book chapter, ‘Self-Leadership and SuperLeadership: the Heart and the Art of Creating Shared Leadership in teams’, Houghton, Neck and Manz (2003) outline self-leadership and superleadership as two antecedent factors in the emergence of shared leadership. They define shared leadership as a ‘process through which individual team members share in performing the behaviours and roles of a traditional hierarchical team leader’ (ibid. p.124). The role of the superleader is to encourage the development of self-leadership that in turn will lead to the emergence of shared leadership. Since this conceptual framework is the one most often cited and arguably the most influential, I will spend some time considering its central constructs – self-leadership and superleadership. By so doing additional insight into the nature of entity-based models of the self can be gained and further articulation of the potential gap in the literature related to the exploration of fine-grained team dynamics.

Self-leadership is conceptualized as a ‘systematic set of strategies through which individuals can lead themselves to higher levels of performance and effectiveness’ (ibid. p.124). Self-leadership is seen as being central to the emergence of shared leadership. Team members who are effective self-leaders are more likely to be

willing to accept leadership from others. The primary role of the vertical leader is to facilitate the development of self-leadership in order that shared leadership would then be most likely to emerge. The capacity to do this is described as superleadership – a leader who leads others to lead themselves. When shared leadership does emerge, it influences positively team affective responses such as commitment and team cohesion, and behaviours such as effort and communication. These shifts in affective responses and behaviours in turn are related positively to overall team effectiveness. What then is this self-leadership that the superLeader is meant to nurture in team members?

Self-leadership is based on the related theories of self-regulation (Kanfer, 1970) and self-control (Mahoney and Thoresen, 1974) as well as more advanced theories of self-influence such as social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) and clinical cognitive psychology (Seligman, 1991). Self-regulation is considered to happen automatically in organizational settings as the individual adapts to externally set norms of behaviour – the thermostat is often used as a metaphor to illustrate this point. Self-control achieved by regulating the error from certain standards is a rather muted form of self-influence since it does not elaborate how self-monitoring or self-awareness occurs nor how standards are set. Self-leadership therefore is also based on more augmented concepts in social cognitive and clinical cognitive psychology in which more elaborate forms of self-influence are theorized.

'Taken together, self-leadership represents a diversified portfolio of self-influence strategies that are hypothesized to positively influence individual behaviour, thought processes, and related outcomes' (Houghton, Neck and Manz, p.128).

Self-leadership, this model suggests, will then lead to increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) in relation to the sharing of leadership roles and functions. This in turn, leads to positive attitudes to the sharing of leadership that are most likely to result in the emergence of shared leadership.

The rationalist assumptions underlying this model suggest that an individual can identify dysfunctional cognitive patterns, unhelpful thoughts and behaviours and alter them by applying various strategies of self-management. This suggests that one part of the self can be sequestered off to manage another part of the self. The use of engineering metaphors suggests the existence of standards evaluated as desirable by one part of the self in an unambiguous way (Shenhav, 2003).

Dysfunctional behaviour – deviations from these standards – can be identified discretely from non-dysfunctional behaviour and addressed affirmatively for the overall improvement of the self. The self is thus reduced to a project of self-surveillance and improvement – an administration self-governed by a knowing mind. It suggests that the unconscious irrational parts of the self can be corralled and bounded by a rational and autonomous part of the self that remains untouched by unconscious forces – this then is the essence of what is meant by entity-based theories of the self. I do not subscribe to such a reductionist view of the self and eschew a psychology that views the self in this way. This over-determined

mechanistic view of the individual represents, in my view, an over-extension of applied engineering to the human domain – that individuals can engineer the self through a process of calibration and error correction. The pervasiveness of this view in mainstream managerial thinking reflects the dominance of a masculinist discourse of which the ‘great man’ theories of leadership are but a part (Fletcher, 2004). It is understandable that with such rationalist entity-based views of the self, the team-based shared leadership literature struggles to engage with the fine-grained group processes that the authors in the field suggest are required for the further elaboration of what happens when groups try to share leadership.

The second main construct in this model, ‘superleadership’, similarly represents the over-extension of an engineering metaphor in which idealized forms of behaviour are said to create certain desired outcomes and that they will do so consistently and reliably over time. This conceptual framework suggests that a vertical leader plays a very important role in the creation of shared leadership. It suggests a model for implementing shared leadership rather than simply studying teams in which leadership, as perceived by team members, comes from multiple individuals. Thus, while most of this literature focusses on shared leadership as an emergent property of a group, this model considers it as one potential part of the portfolio of interventions that a formally appointed vertical leader can have in order to facilitate a transformation in the team culture to one in which leadership is shared. This is an important distinction since it suggests that leadership is shared but only under the auspices of a vertical leader who has decided to allow most leadership functions to be taken up by other group members. Shared

leadership is thus a special case of vertical leadership – it is shared leadership but only when facilitated by the vertical leader.

Finally, an important aspect of this model is that reference is made to ‘affective responses’. As with the review of the empirical papers, the importance of affective factors within a team is theorized as being central to the emergence or implementation of shared leadership. However, in this study there is no exploration of what these might entail. Instead any difficulties that a team might have in taking up the various leadership roles that the superLeader will make available is considered to be a matter of team maturity, the correct selection of members or a skills deficit. The difficulty in describing what affective responses may actually consist of is problematic within a rationalist world view. Many of the issues outlined here apply to the other conceptual frameworks within this literature.

The following conceptual frameworks from this literature will be considered: a model of shared leadership with new product development (NPD) teams (Cox, Pearce and Perry, 2003); a model of shared cognition in enabling shared leadership to emerge (Burke, Fiore and Salas, 2003); a group exchange structure approach (Seibert, Sparrowe and Liden, 2003); a model of shared leadership using a social network approach that we saw in three of the empirical studies (Mayo, Meindl and Pastor, 2003); and finally, a model that introduces some concepts that are from an alternative research paradigm and considers the consequences of seeing shared leadership from a relational perspective in which the usually

unquestioned entity-based perspective on the individual is challenged (Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003). Following some summarizing paragraphs about the shared leadership literature as a whole, this will conclude my survey of the shared leadership literature and I will then begin to consider those aspects of the distributed leadership literature in the education sector that are relevant to the domain of Management and Organizational Studies (MOS).

Shared Leadership in New Product Development (NPD) teams

This model is similar to the empirical studies, framing antecedent factors around the emergence of shared leadership that can then be correlated with team outcomes. It outlines 14 propositions that can be tested by further research. There are two sets of antecedent factors that lead to the emergence of leadership behaviours shared among group members – shared leadership. Like so many of the previous studies, these leadership behaviours are defined by a leadership styles questionnaire. One set of antecedent factors is related to the work of the vertical leader such as ‘team formation’ and ‘boundary management’ and the other set refers to team characteristics such as ‘team size’ and ‘maturity’ that will help or hinder the emergence of shared leadership (Cox et al., 2003). From these two sets of antecedent factors – one from the team and one from the vertical leader – shared leadership may emerge

What is noteworthy in this model is that, despite being limited in the same way as other studies within the literature, it does provide greater conceptual depth to descriptions of some of the antecedent factors, in particular ‘leadership support’

and 'shared leadership maintenance'. Both of these allude at least conceptually to what the empirical papers have not successfully addressed – some of the relational affective dynamics that might be inherent to attempts to implement shared leadership.

Leadership support in this model means that vertical leaders must judge when to step in and re-assert their hierarchical authority when it is required and when to allow the team members to take up their own authority. The precarious nature of this work is described as 'negotiating a balance between abdication at one extreme and disempowering seizure of control at the other' (ibid. p.59).

Shared leadership maintenance refers to the way in which a vertical leader must empower team members toward self-leadership and peer lateral influence. Both these aspects of the vertical leader's role – leadership support and shared leadership maintenance – highlight usefully the potential difficulties of transitioning from a team culture in which members may resist or not feel ready for shared leadership. In other words, subordinates may perceive any attempt to shift toward shared leadership as a failure to lead and be unsettled and resentful of such shifts. This is the first study in the literature to explicitly refer to such possibilities.

Despite the useful conceptualization of some of these relational dynamics, this conceptual framework sits firmly within the entity-based objectivist camp and the research methodologies that go with it. Again it is clear that there is a strong

awareness of the centrality of such dynamics to understanding shared leadership. However, there is as yet little possibility of a research methodology being proposed that would allow for the exploration of these dynamics at the level of process. In the same way, the next model, while offering some rich conceptualizations, remains limited by its commitment to a rationalist perspective and to shared leadership as serial emergence. I will consider it briefly.

A model of shared cognition in enabling shared leadership to emerge

This model provides a deeper level of conceptual richness to the antecedent conditions than we have seen so far. Burke et al., (2003) define shared leadership as ‘the transference of the leadership function among team members in order to take advantage of member strengths (i.e. knowledge, skills, attitudes, perspectives, contacts and time available) as dictated by either environmental demands or the developmental stage of the team.’ (p.105). This is a model therefore that links shared leadership to a team’s internal adaptive capacity. These authors set out a conceptual framework that attempts to highlight the factors that influence positively the transition of leadership between group members. The transference of the leadership function is seen as an adaptive response to changes in the external environment or to changes within the team context. According to their model, if there is sufficient commonality in the way team members view and make sense of their situation and at the same time there are shared attitudes to collective work that legitimizes peer influence, then shared leadership is likely to emerge. They present a model that emphasizes the potential role that shared cognition has in creating these conditions in which shared leadership emerges.

The notion of shared cognition requires that there must be an area of overlap in team members' understanding of a number of drivers theorized in this model to work together to produce an internal adaptive culture in which leadership will be shared. Thus drivers such as mental models become *shared* mental models, and a driver such as a situation assessment becomes a *shared* situation assessment.

The model proposes four drivers that work together to produce team behaviours in which leadership is shared: situation assessment, meta-cognition, mental models and team member attitudes. The latter in this case refer to beliefs and dispositional attributes related to shared leadership. When shared leadership does emerge, it will be reflected in two important team behaviours: the team will know when and to whom leadership should move, and the team members accept being peer led.

This model is conceptually rich. However, it relies on essentialist arguments that individual strengths and skills can be identified and matched with emerging elements of the situation in unproblematic ways. Moreover, the model assumes that leadership can be considered to be shared leadership when it moves from one team member to the other – the same individualist approach that appears in the empirical studies and conceptual models considered so far. This model, rather than being an alternative to the heroic 'great man' theories, is in danger of characterizing serial heroic leadership.

Finally, like so many of these models, the affective issue as to the possible ways in which team members may resist the implementation of shared leadership is theorized as attitudinal factors such as 'open climate' or 'collective orientation'. The limitations of theorizing affective factors in a team in this way, is clear. Conceptualizing affective factors as attitudinal allows them to be explored through survey questions but renders them less amenable to exploration at the level of ongoing processes. Furthermore the cognitive aspects of the possible antecedents to the sharing of leadership is central to this model while questions of affect which play a central role in whether shared leadership is successfully implemented are conceptually at the periphery of the model.

The next conceptual framework is an important model in so much as it highlights for the first time some of the ways in which the structure of social relationships between team members can strongly impact on the emergence or implementation of shared leadership. It describes a range of relational dynamics that although based on an entity-based perspective are conceptually rich.

A group exchange structure approach to leadership in groups

This is an important model since, for the first time, it places the quality of relationships among group members at the centre of whether and how shared leadership would emerge. It therefore brings affective relational dynamics conceptually to centre stage.

Seibert et al. (2003) begin by pointing out that one of the implicit assumptions of the shared leadership theory of Pearce and Sims (2000), referenced widely in this literature, is that influence across the team members is relatively equal. In this study, the shared leadership construct is reframed within an approach based on social exchange structures in groups. When leadership is shared, the role of other group members in supporting the behaviour of another team member or the vertical leader is crucial. The quality of the relationship will be a major determining factor in what kind of support is forthcoming. Using leader-member exchange (LMX) theory as a theoretical base, high quality relationships between leaders and subordinates lead to very different benefits from relationships that are deemed to be of low quality. In terms of shared leadership, those team members between whom there are high quality relationships would be expected to exercise a high level of mutual influence over each other.

Three types of social exchange are theorized – balanced, generalized and negative. Balanced exchange relationships are the equivalent of low LMX relationship since they are characterized by immediate and reciprocal exchanges – as a *quid pro quo* transaction. Generalized exchange relationships are like high LMX exchanges to the extent that equivalency is not required immediately but will, it is assumed, balance out in terms of reciprocation over time. Negative exchange relationships are those in which the exchange partners pursue only self-interest and may even act to the detriment of the other. In such relationships the kind of influence tactics used are likely to be aversive or related to coalition building. The pattern of

exchange relations affects decision-making, information sharing, conflict-resolution and member satisfaction within the group.

The model outlines five prototypical group exchange structures. Type 1 represents a unified structure in which all relationships are generalized exchange types and therefore there are expectations that mutual trust levels will be high, and co-operation, decision-making and conflict resolution processes will be smooth. This social exchange pattern is the one assumed in survey questions in empirical studies when a single group's overall measure is used, on the assumption that the group influence can be described without differentiation. Since all group members are equally central, this structure will not engender power differences. This is likely to lead to high levels of satisfaction with regard to group membership and adherence to soft influence strategies, and a high commitment to group norms.

The Type 2 relational structure shows a unified network except for some isolates. This occurs when some group member have negative relationships with others resulting in some loss in terms of co-ordination, information sharing and overall effectiveness. It is possible that one of the isolates is the formal leader of the group with obvious implications for performance.

Type 3 represents a group with two polarized sub-groups. Such a group social structure may occur when isolates form generalized exchange relationships amongst each other but have negative exchange relationships with members of the

other sub-group. This group may be characterized by competition, conflict and attempts to undermine the performance of the other group.

Type 4 represents a situation in which several coalitions form within one group. Between members of the coalitions there are generalized relationships but negative relationships with all other coalitions. Coalitions seek to have control of the maximum number of resources under their control with detrimental effects to overall group performance.

Type 5 is a pure type of social exchange structure in which everyone has a negative relationship with all other group members and pursues their own self-interest. A lack of mutual trust amongst members, poor co-ordination of effort, and a low level of commitment to group goals all characterize group behaviour in this case.

As with the other conceptual frameworks we have considered thus far, some indication of the role of the vertical leader is included in this model. The vertical leader should attempt to create conditions in which the group evolves to a relational exchange structure depicted by either Type 1 or 2. A number of suggestions are made as to how this could be achieved. The vertical leader, it is suggested, should attempt to form generalized social relationships within the team and to gradually attempt to include the isolates. The danger is that isolates may form a coalition, in which case the vertical leader should try to form a generalized relationship with one member of each coalition. This kind of advice represents an attempt to theorize the relational dynamics from an entity-based perspective,

likely to be engendered by an attempt to implement shared leadership. For the first time, explicit reference is made to behaviours such as scapegoating, competition, blocking, and even to a situation in which vertical leaders should attempt to pit one group member against another in the service of evolving the group to a more effective way of functioning. We are, therefore, moving away from the bundling up of such relational dynamics into abstract constructs such as aversive leadership behaviour described within empirical studies as line items on survey questions. This model introduces for the first time some language that highlights the kinds of relational dynamics that can exist within a team and which are likely to prove inimical to the emergence and implementation of shared leadership. As Seibert et al. say, 'the multiple ways in which group social exchange structure affects group process and performance, is we believe an area ripe for empirical exploration' (ibid. p.181). Just how this is possible using a social network analysis will be explored in the next model.

Shared leadership in work teams: A social network approach

This conceptual framework by Mayo et al. (2003) is referenced within three empirical studies considered earlier and represents the first articulation of how social network analysis can be applied to the study of shared leadership.

The authors outline an application of social network analysis to shared leadership as an attempt to conceptualize the complex nature of the reciprocal and recursive group influence processes that must, by definition, be a part of any system of shared leadership. To illustrate their model, the authors outline an example using a

hypothetical five-member team. The social network defined in this model is the organizationally defined work group – a vertical leader and subordinates. The focus of this study is contrasting forms of leadership influence defined by transactional and transformational leadership.

Two examples of survey questions related to transactional and transformational leadership are used; for example, 'how often does each member of your team acknowledge and reward you for your contribution to the team?' This is an example of a transactional leadership question. Respondents fill in a frequency score of between 1 and 5. The result is that each person in the five-person team has a score for both transactional and transformational leadership averaged across the questions from that leadership category.

These data are then transformed into a binary set of data so that they can be used to define relational ties and represented graphically in a network. The result is that data regarding the presence or absence of a relationship based on perceptions of whether this person has exercised leadership or not *are* preserved while data pertaining to the strength of the relationship are lost. Values of two or less are considered as zero while more than two are given a value of one. These can then be displayed in tables and representative sociograms.

One useful measure is that of network dispersion – the degree to which influence is concentrated or centralized in a network. It is possible, using this analysis, to derive mathematically scores of attributed influence to each individual – an index

of individual centrality – the dispersion of which can then be calculated. A team centralization score can then also be calculated to illustrate the degree to which leadership influence is concentrated on a few individuals – and this can be displayed visually.

A high level of network concentration suggests that shared leadership has not emerged. Shared leadership occurs when the attribution of influence among team members is about equal. However, a measure of concentration of leadership influence can usefully be supplemented by a consideration of network density. A measure of concentration for two teams may be the same, although the overall number of ties is low relative to the maximum number of ties possible if all members attributed influence to all other members. A team with five members who nominate one different member each will have a concentration of zero since attributed influence is evenly distributed – no one dominates. However, a team in which everyone nominates all other team members also has a concentration score of zero but its network density is much higher. The higher density suggests that there is generally a lot of attributed influence in the group which might suggest that there is also a lot of leadership related activity. It is therefore useful to consider both scores of concentration and density.

Finally, Mayo et al. propose a matrix to summarize some of these points with high-low decentralization on one axis and high-low density on the other. High levels of decentralization combined with high network density suggest that team members are strongly influencing one another and this could therefore be considered to be

shared leadership. Similarly high network density and low decentralization suggests influence is more concentrated in one or two individuals and thus may suggest the presence of more traditional vertical leadership.

This approach represents a powerful conceptual and visual description of what shared leadership may look like. It is, however, unable to describe the fine-grained processes of why a team might have one pattern of density and concentration or another. Why these particular individuals rather than others? Are there sub-groups and if so, who is in them and why? What is the relationship between these sub-groups and why? Answers to these and many other questions remain unavailable through such analysis. So, as with the previous conceptual framework based on the group exchange structure, social network analysis can reveal much about the perceived relational patterns of leadership influence within a team, but only up to a point. Information derived from such an analysis could certainly be used to justify further exploration of team dynamics at a processual level using a qualitative research methodology. However, it is not possible to explore the actual processes that are going on in the team using social network analysis.

Another feature of the conceptual frameworks considered so far is that they are one-offs. By this I mean that scholars who have written these chapters have, for the most part, not continued to study shared leadership. The impression is that a number of authors who have a particular interest, such as shared cognition or social networks or social exchange, have attempted to extend these constructs into the domain of shared leadership. But there has been little or no further research

that has picked up any of these strands – the exception being the social network analysis model for shared leadership that appears in three empirical papers that we have considered so far. A final conceptual model however, by Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) does represent a paradigmatic shift in ontological and epistemological perspectives that contrasts strongly with both conceptual and empirical papers considered so far within this literature. It also highlights the debates within the wider leadership literature outlined at the beginning of this review. These debates touch on issues of how the self is theorized and thus how relational dynamics are conceptualized and process engaged with.

Shared leadership and the self-in-relation

The potential gap in the literature identified so far relates to the exploration of the fine-grained relational dynamics involved in shared leadership and the lack of the methodological means to do so. Several of the conceptual frameworks reviewed thus far theorize the existence of potentially problematic dynamics within teams for vertical leaders attempting to implement shared leadership. However, no research methods have appeared in the empirical studies reviewed that allow for the collection of data that might explore such dynamics as they are evolving. The dynamics that are of most interest are those that will potentially impair or encourage the evolution of shared leadership or hinder or bolster any attempt to implement it. The main issue inhibiting the articulation of research methodologies is the entity-based theory of the self which is central to an objectivist research paradigm that dominates the leadership (Drath et al, 2008). The shared leadership model of Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) proposes an alternative theory of

the self – a ‘self-in-relation’. The self-in-relation draws strongly from relational models within psychoanalysis (Mitchell, 1988) that will be considered in some depth in the next chapter on systems psychodynamics. However, it is considered briefly here for the purposes of review.

This model is strikingly different from all the others considered so far because it is based on an alternative set of ontological assumptions about the nature of organizations, and most importantly the individual. In contrast to the entity-based models Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) propose what they call a relational perspective on shared leadership. This term is related to the alternative view of the self – the self-in-relation. Drawing on concepts from the Stone Center Relational Theory (Miller, 1984; Miller and Stiver, 1997) based partly on a social constructionist and partly psychoanalytic perspective, the self-in-relation is proposed as a central construct within shared leadership. This allows for a different conceptualization of relational dynamics that in turn suggests a different approach to engaging with process in social systems.

Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) start by describing three aspects of relational shared leadership. Firstly, that the actions of any one individual exist in a web of leadership practices that are widely distributed in the organization – ascribing leadership to one individual is thus inaccurate. Secondly, leadership when shared is embedded in and arises from social interactions. These social interactions are not hierarchical acts of downward uni-directional influence, as in traditional models but are instead collaborative, egalitarian and mutual in nature. ‘Rather

than a focus on the leader's effect on followers, the followers are understood as playing a role in influencing and creating leadership' (Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003, p.23). Thirdly, leadership is about collective learning. Shared leadership focusses on interactions that have a particular quality – they create mutual understanding and learning. This learning is not merely at the individual level but at the collective. It is what Heifetz refers to as adaptive learning (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz and Laurie, 1999, 1997). The focus on collective adaptive learning implies a need for 'relational practices and skills such as authenticity, openness, vulnerability, and the ability to anticipate the responses and learning needs of others' (Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003, p.24). These relational skills and practices function at a group level when leadership is shared.

Central to this model is an alternative ontological perspective based on a relational view of the self. Stone Center Relational Theory was developed in the 1970s and 1980s at the Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Here feminist writers – psychologists and psychiatrists such as Jean Baker Miller – outlined an alternative theory of human growth characterized not by increasing autonomy and independence but by the capacity for mature connection to others (Josselson, 2007; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver and Surrey, 1991; Jordan, 1986).

This theory is also rooted in relational psychoanalytic theories, particularly the Object Relations approach and the work of Melanie Klein (Klein, 1959, 1952, 1946). Autonomy and independence are hallmarks of the mature adult within traditional human development models based on a view of the self as an entity. In

contrast, for relational theorists, relationship is theorized as the primary source of human growth. Growth is not therefore about processes of separation but processes of connection (Jordan et al., 1991; Jordan, 1986).

Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) argue that building and sustaining connection to others lies at the heart of shared leadership. They point out that many of the relational skills required for the successful implementation and maintenance of shared leadership – such as collaboration, developing relationships and vulnerability – are perceived within traditional models of human development as signalling an impaired maturation process, i.e. individuals who seek connection to others are psychologically immature. For the same reason Fletcher (2004) suggests that many of these behaviours will not be acknowledged as acts of leadership and may in fact ‘disappear’.

The self-in-relation from the Stone Center Relational Theory differs from the discrete self-isolate of entity-based models. Using social constructionist thinking, the very notion of a stable psychological inner world to which agency can be attributed is questioned (Gergen, 2009, 1999). Leadership emerges from the constant flow and flux of social interactions that occur across an organization as individuals engage with their tasks. These social interactions are not the property of individuals but occur as group level phenomena. The only way to understand these group level phenomena is to explore the micro-processes of which they consist. Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) recognize how this perspective on shared leadership informs the research agenda for this new field.

'We agree that the theory and practice of shared leadership would benefit from a closer examination of the relational micro-processes that embody the group-level phenomenon noted in concepts of shared leadership' (ibid. p.22).

The Stone Center Relational Theory includes a commitment to a form of dialogue in which team members evolve through four phases from a norm enforcing kind of dialogue – 'talking nice' – to a final form of dialogue called 'generative dialogue' in which there is an almost exclusive focus on group level achievement. This is similar to the model of team development conceptualized in the first empirical study covered by this review – that of Avolio and colleagues exploring shared leadership as the culmination of a maturing team development process (Avolio et al., 1996).

Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) seem content to emphasize the more social constructionist aspects of this model and make links to power and gender as important factors that may undermine any possibility of shared leadership from emerging or being sustained. However, they fail to explore the conceptual richness of the roots of this model in the relational psychoanalytic tradition on which it is based. Despite citing the work of Heifetz and Laurie (1999, 1997) and referring to the Object Relations school of psychoanalysis, Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) do not take this further. Why this appears as an omission is that Heifetz and Laurie's work which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter on adaptive leadership specifically addresses two important aspects of the shared leadership literature. Firstly, they address what happens in an organization when the outside

environment changes in a way that causes a disequilibrium to which internal adaptation is required. Almost without exception, the studies we have considered so far, both empirical and conceptual, position shared leadership as an empirical phenomenon whose emergence reflects developments in the global business environment. Secondly, Heifetz and Laurie suggest that such external challenges induce powerful systemic affect within the organization which leaders must respond to if the required adaptive learning is to take place (Heifetz and Laurie, 1999, 1997). These authors conceptualize this affective dynamic as a group level phenomenon – something that has proved to be theoretically elusive in this literature. This concept of systemic affect was available to Fletcher and Kaufer but they fail to elaborate its potential for addressing the gap in the literature that we have identified thus far, i.e. the need to explore the systemic affect in groups in which shared leadership is being implemented – and to do this deploying a research methodology that will allow for a process oriented research design. For the purposes of addressing this gap in the literature, the implementation of shared leadership is best studied in the context of a team facing adaptive challenges. This gap will be further refined below as the literature on distributed leadership within the Management and Organizational Studies literature is reviewed.

The theoretical antecedents of distributed leadership

To identify the main theoretical antecedents of the distributed leadership literature we must start with the work of Gronn. Following the publication of his Leadership Quarterly paper ‘distributed leadership as a unit of analysis’ (Gronn, 2002), Gronn is cited frequently within the shared leadership literature. However,

despite this, few of Gronn's central concepts such as 'conjoint agency' or 'concertive action' are discussed in the shared leadership literature. In fact, even though Gronn's work represents a point of crossover between the two literatures, this is limited to citation and does not lead to any significant conceptual cross-fertilization. This reflects fundamentally different philosophical assumptions as to the nature of leadership and a set of theoretical antecedents to distributed leadership that are distinct from those of shared leadership. The four main theoretical antecedents are outlined here.

(i) The work of Cecil Gibb

The first is the work of Gibb. Often cited by Gronn and probably the first writer to use the term 'distributed leadership', Cecil Gibb (1969, 1954) was a social psychologist who carried out research at the Universities of Sydney and Illinois in which emphasis was placed on leadership, not as a set of individual traits but as a function of group goals and values. 'Leadership' he said, 'is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group' (Gibb, 1954, p.844). Gibb describes leadership on a spectrum from 'focussed', where influence is concentrated in one individual, to 'distributed' when it is more dispersed and based on mutual and reciprocal patterns of influence. In this way, leadership could be considered as a group level phenomenon rather than a matter of individual skills, traits or characteristics.

(ii) Social constructionism

This notion of distributed leadership was not taken up again until 1986 with Brown and Hosking's study of distributed leadership in social movements. A second theoretical antecedent, also cited by Gronn, is Hosking's elaboration of

leadership as a social process emerging and sustained in the inter-subjective interactions of individuals (Hosking, 1988). Hosking's approach to leadership is one that focusses on leadership as something that emerges, and is constitutive of and constituted by social processes. This social constructionist approach contrasts strongly with entity-based approaches that are central to the more objectivist approaches of researchers within the shared leadership literature. When considering leadership, she states:

'It is essential to focus on leadership processes: processes in which influential acts of organizing contribute to the structuring of interactions and relationships, activities and sentiments; processes in which definitions of social order are negotiated, found acceptable, implemented and renegotiated' (Hosking, 1988, p.148).

These ideas surface in both the theoretical work of Gronn and the conceptual framework and practitioner based research of Spillane, and are widely disseminated in the education sector in both the US and in the UK.

(iii) Activity theory

A third theoretical antecedent cited by both Gronn and Spillane is 'activity theory' – particularly the work of Engeström (2000). Activity theory relates to ways in which the actions of human actors are constrained and enabled by the historical, cultural, political and social contexts in which they occur. The work of Engeström is part of the Helsinki School of Activity Theory with Marxist roots in the Social Development Theory of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) and theories of consciousness and activity expressed in the work of Aleksei Leontiev (1981).

Spillane and others appropriate aspects of activity theory that emphasizes the importance of how 'social context is an integral component, not just of a container, for intelligent activity' (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2001, p.23). Activity theory emphasizes how no human activity can be understood without taking into account the ways in which historical context and culture in a particular context are constitutive of human thought and action.

(iv) Distributed cognition

A fourth theoretical antecedent and one which lends further conceptual weight to this notion of how human intelligence is not merely a function of individual capacities but is distributed across aspects of context is Hutchins' notion of 'distributed cognition' (Hutchins, 1995). Distributed cognition relates to the ways in which the cognitions and experience of individuals are strongly linked to the physical social and cultural contexts in which they occur. Cognition is thus best thought of as distributed across aspects of the physical context. The instruments in a flight cockpit do not merely respond to the pilot's actions but allow certain kinds of leadership in relation to a wide range of tasks such as safety to be enacted – a pilot cannot provide leadership in relation to altitude without the necessary instrumentation. In a school, a numeracy assessment tool for grade 5 students is not merely a passive object used by teachers but does itself create the possibility for leadership around the task of improving numeracy skills to be enacted.

This perspective has led to a strong emphasis within distributed leadership on leadership as a practice in which leadership is 'stretched over' the interactions

between leaders, followers and aspects of the situations in which they work (Spillane, 2006).

The education-based distributed leadership literature

This review covers the literature on distributed leadership within the Management and Organizational Studies (MOS) literature. The potential gap in the literature identified so far relates to exploring the fine-grained relational processes that actually go on within a team as leadership is shared. Of particular interest are those processes that reveal the kinds of patterns of affect that may be mobilized in the face of adaptive work and how these dynamics may help or hinder the sharing of leadership – this has been noted several times in this review already.

Unlike the shared leadership literature, this literature is dominated by the work of a few main theorists and researchers – in particular Peter Gronn originally based in Australia, and James Spillane based at North Western University in the United States. While there have been other elaborations on distributed leadership (Leithwood, Mascall and Strauss, 2009; McBeth, 2008) for the most part they are based on the work of these two main authors. As such, this review will be based mainly on their work.

The literature is also characterised by much repetition – although Gronn has written several pieces, the core model of distributed leadership remains largely unchanged. The work of Spillane is also highly repetitive with many of the same conceptual ideas appearing many times.

Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis

Gronn's (2002) paper on 'distributed leadership as a unit of analysis' brought these two disparate strands of research – the shared and distributed leadership literatures – together for the first time. It marks the point at which distributed leadership appeared in the MOS literature. I will consider it at some length because it is so often cited and yet its central ideas are rarely explored. The paper proposes:

'A unit of analysis which encompasses patterns or varieties of distributed leadership. To that end, I outline a framework for understanding distributed organizational leadership and a taxonomy for classifying varieties of distributed patterns, based on a range of constituent elements identified in research studies'

(Gronn, 2002, p.424)

Gronn identifies patterns of distributed leadership by reference to 21 studies with which he is familiar and in which the authors – some of whom identify their study with distributed leadership and some who do not – present descriptions of a negotiated distribution of leadership that vary considerably. These range from studies from the education sector, such as Powell's study of an Australian Catholic secondary school (Powell, 1997), to studies cited within the shared leadership literature, such as the study of US medical administrators by Hodgson et al. (1965), as well as studies such as Murnighan and Conlon's (1991) study of UK-based string quartets.

Gronn (2002) develops a conceptualization of distributed leadership based on empirical descriptions from these studies. Because this model considers leadership occurring across the organization, much of the resulting conceptual framework differs from that of the team-based shared leadership literature reviewed so far in which the main focus is on the behaviour of stand-alone teams.

The ontological assumptions that underpin Gronn's work are mostly based on a social constructionist perspective and place emphasis on the ways in which shared leadership practices are both constituted by and constitutive of social interactions. These assumptions allow for some further elaboration of the processual elements that, with the exception of Fletcher and Kaufer's relational model, remain elusive within the shared leadership literature.

In addition Gronn (2002) also cites the work of several psychodynamic authors – as do Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) – and like Fletcher and Kaufer, Gronn does not make further overt links to the psychodynamic theoretical framework.

A new division of labour

Gronn's starting point is to say that 'the main difficulty created by orthodox formulations such as leader-followers and leadership-followership is that they *prescribe* rather than *describe*, a division of labour' (Gronn, 2002, p.428). Heroic individual accounts of leadership are inaccurate because they do not describe the division of labour as it pertains to an increasing number of organizations.

Changes to the division of labour – both technical and social aspects – occur according to processes of fusion and fragmentation, i.e. new ways of combining work elements that were not present before, as well as the breaking up of other work elements into new configurations. ‘The duality of differentiation-integration inherent in a division of labour is the source of new forms of role interdependence and co-ordination which have resulted in distributed patterns of leadership’ (ibid. p.428).

In a similar fashion to authors within the shared leadership literature, Gronn suggests that the source of these changes to the division of labour is, increasingly, shifts in the external environment in which leadership takes place.

Concertive action

Gronn’s next step is to make a critical distinction between the way shared and distributed leadership are theorized. He distinguishes between distributed leadership as *numerical* action and distributed leadership as *concertive* action. The first refers to the passing on of leadership from one individual to another – serial emergence – which is the conceptual mainstay of the team-based shared leadership literature. Gronn asserts it is more appropriate to see distributed leadership as concertive action, i.e. the unit of analysis is not the simple aggregate of individual acts or attributed influence but the action of a concertive unit such as a pair or larger group. He describes three types of concertive action that represent increasing levels of institutionalization. They are spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations and thirdly, institutionalized practices; the latter might

include, for example, the formation of a senior team. Each of these forms of concertive action represents increasing degrees of institutionalization. They also represent different forms of distributed leadership. When concertive units work in close proximity, this form of distributed leadership is described as co-performance, and when working in different places as collective performance.

Whether by co-performance or collective performance, the most distinctive characteristic of concertive units is that the members act conjointly – with what Gronn terms conjoint agency. Conjoint agency means, ‘that agents synchronise their actions by having regard to their own plans, those of their peers, and their sense of unit membership’. Conjoint agency consists of at least two processual elements – *synergy* and *reciprocal influence*.

Synergy and reciprocal influence

Synergy arises when members of the concertive unit work closely. Gronn quotes from Mary Parker Follet – the earliest antecedent study identified within the team-based shared leadership literature. This quote is interesting because it attempts to capture the simultaneous recursive aspect of how individuals may influence one another. Synergy within a concertive unit is when each unit member:

‘calls out something from the other, releases something, frees something, opens the way for the expression of latent capacities and possibilities.’ (Follet, 1973, p.162)

The phrase 'calls something out from the other' suggests that what is called out may not always be clear or planned, or possibly desirable or necessarily noticed. This is the antithesis of the description of self-leadership encountered in the conceptual framework of Houghton et al. (2003) in which the self can be effectively engineered through cycles of self-regulation. The comment that concertive action, 'Frees something, opens the way for the expression of latent capacities and possibilities' (ibid. p.162) is suggestive of a group level phenomenon since competence and performance are not merely a reflection of individual traits, skills and behaviours but are related to proximity to others and the experience of co-working.

Reciprocal influence is the second processual element that Gronn suggests is integral to conjoint agency. Reciprocal influence can be both internal and external to the group. It is described as a 'zigzagging spiral' of influence in which A influences and is influenced by B and C who all then react to this influence in a successive round of influence and so on. This can include individuals outside the concertive unit who attribute leadership to the focal concertive unit. How close does Gronn's conceptualization of these two processual elements – synergy and reciprocal influence – allow for the exploration of the group level micro-processes that I have identified as constituting an important gap in the literature so far?

To answer this question, the final section of the 2002 paper by Gronn, using the selected studies in his paper, explores the factors that contribute to the emergence of these two processual elements that constitute conjoint agency – synergy and

reciprocal influence. Gronn states that because the aims of the studies – all 21 of them – are so different, it is not possible to discern factors related to reciprocal influence. He therefore focusses on synergy and describes two types – formal and informal.

Formal and informal synergy

Formal synergies are based on having an organizational role and include four sub-types: cross-hierarchy, trusteeship, parity of relations and separation of powers.

Informal synergy relates to personal relations such as friendship.

However, very little space is used to discuss the personal relations of which informal synergy consists. Instead, considerably more space is used to discuss the four sub-types of *formal* synergy. His basic point is that different kinds of arrangements will contribute to behaviours that may prove inimical to the development of synergies between individuals. I will briefly outline one example of each of the four sub-types of synergy as they illustrate the strengths and limitations of Gronn's conceptual framework.

(i) ***Cross-hierarchy*** refers to how synergies can be achieved by individuals working together, despite having roles representing different parts of an organization. The Hodgson et al. (1965) study of how three senior hospital psychiatrists attempted to operate 'as a whole' represents a template for how this kind of synergy can be achieved. It requires the ongoing negotiation of roles – each individual specializes but the boundaries and areas of overlap of responsibilities constantly shift and this requires constant attention.

(ii) *Trusteeship* is referred to as ideally being a situation in which trustees, particularly board chairmen, are actively involved in the stewardship of the organization in order to balance out the potential abuse of executive power exercised by very senior managers. The chief executive and chair would develop a synergistic working relationship based on mutual recognition that this kind of oversight is necessary.

(iii) *Parity of relations* refers to groups in which hierarchy is largely dispensed with, such as the Moosewood collective (Vanderslice, 1988) consisting of 18 members who made collective decisions and rotated roles and responsibilities regularly, or string quartets held together by a common performance output but still having differentiated roles such as first and second violin. Gronn explores in some detail the various complications entailed by these arrangements.

(iv) *Separation of powers* is illustrated by Gronn by citing the longitudinal study in the Canadian health sector by Denis, Lamothe and Langley (2001) that explored the consequences of having authority distributed between a number of governing structures all with power over separate aspects of the development and implementation of overall strategy. 'A decade's research, however, revealed shifting institution-based patterns of collective leadership of varying strength by different combinations of actors, resulting in sporadic achievement of change' (Gronn, 2002, p.441).

Analysis of Gronn's model of distributed leadership

The contrast between these descriptions and both the conceptual and empirical studies of the shared leadership literature, confined as they are to the study of

teams, is very marked. Focussing beyond the team highlights the potential importance of all kinds of institutional, authority and role relations across hierarchies that influence how patterns of distributed leadership may or may not emerge. By using such a rich array of cases, Gronn builds a convincing case for his central notion that there has been a shift in the division of labour within the workplace and that traditional vertical leader accounts of leadership are inadequate.

However, the question remains as to how this conceptual framework provides for the exploration of group level micro-processes? Gronn tries to cover a lot of ground in this paper – he is not proposing the team as the unit of analysis but any concertive unit, be it a pair, a triad or more individuals acting in concert. And by so doing he broadens the scope of his analysis to include organizational level arrangements and how they may affect the emergence of conjoint agency.

However, it is noteworthy that despite describing in some detail the two micro-processual elements of conjoint agency – synergy and reciprocal influence – Gronn finds himself unable to provide any analysis of the latter and describes the former only in terms of institutional arrangements or role relations. He uses the quote from Follet and yet does not really outline the relationship between the quote and his later exposition of the conceptual model. His selection of 21 very varied studies, while resulting in an empirically grounded analysis, loses some of the more micro-level foci that would address the emergent synergies and reciprocal influence that is at the core of his concept of conjoint agency.

Both the final conceptual model at the end of the review of the shared leadership literature – that of Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) – and the work of Gronn reviewed here, draw from a social constructionist world view in which leadership arises in the myriad of social interactions in which meaning is negotiated within particular organizational, political and cultural contexts (Uhl-Bien, 2006, Hosking, 1988).

However, both also draw from the psychodynamic tradition that remains peripheral to their theoretical expositions. Fletcher and Kaufer draw heavily on concepts of the Stone Center Relational Theory and the relational theory of the self. This theory draws as much from the Object Relations school of psychoanalysis as it does from social constructionism and yet it is the latter that predominates in their articulation of their model of shared leadership. They also cite the work of Heifetz who outlines the potential importance of systemic affect in an organization facing an adaptive challenge. It is just such a group level affect that the shared leadership theorists have referred to but not successfully theorized. Gronn also references writers from this same tradition – system psychodynamics – notably Berg’s paper on followership which appeared in a volume entitled ‘The Psychodynamics of Leadership’ (1998); Krantz’s psychodynamic analysis of the manager-subordinate relationship (Krantz, 1989) and the seminal work of Miller (1998, 1959) who was one of the main architects of what was to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s as the system psychodynamic conceptual framework based at the Tavistock Institute. Thus, while Gronn’s conceptual framework is rich, he is unable to elucidate central aspects of his own model due to an emphasis on the social constructionist conceptual roots of his model while leaving the systems psychodynamic aspects as

peripheral. A similar issue was identified in Fletcher and Kaufer's model of the relational self. The potential significance of the systems psychodynamic approach to addressing the gap in the literature will be taken up following the consideration of the work of Spillane who is the second main author within the distributed leadership field as it appears within Managerial and Organizational Studies.

The Distributed Leadership Project at Northwestern University

Even though little of the empirical study of distributed leadership has made its way into the MOS literature, the work of Spillane and his colleagues at Northwestern University in the United States is frequently cited by Gronn (Spillane, 2006, 2004; Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2004, 2001; Spillane, Diamond and Jita, 2003; Spillane, Diamond and Jita, 2000). The distributed leadership project owes its origins to a grant made to Northwestern University by the National Science Foundation and the Spencer Foundation in 1999. The project involved a longitudinal study of 15 schools in the Chicago area and was ostensibly aimed at theory development – although the widespread application of the model in the US and UK suggests that the research has produced normative as well as descriptive theory.

It would not be an exaggeration to describe this area of the literature as dominated by Spillane – he is either the lead author or co-author of all 38 publications listed under 'publications' on the project website and appears as an author of almost all 42 presentations going back to 1999; there is therefore much repetition. The distributed literature can be delineated best by viewing the project website, the

comprehensive publications list and the reference section of Spillane's book, 'Distributed Leadership' (2006), as well as recent studies published in the main MOS related databases, such as EBSCO, Proquest and Web of Knowledge.

The focus within this schools research project is to focus on a definition of distributed leadership that is neither 'right' nor 'wrong' but a useful working definition that allows individuals to think and talk differently about leadership. Central to this model is a view of leadership as a practice.

'To begin with distributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice, rather than leaders, leadership roles or leadership functions. Leadership practice is the core unit of analysis in trying to understand school leadership from a distributed perspective' (Spillane, 2004)

Accounts of leadership practice in this model are derived from a set of assumptions that are similar to those of Gronn. Firstly, shared and distributed leadership are contrasted in the same way. Shared leadership is the aggregate of observed behaviours of serially emergent leaders. Spillane calls this shared leadership the 'leader-plus' perspective. Conceptualizing shared leadership as the leadership of more than one individual fails to capture the importance of *interactions* between leaders and followers, and secondly such models of shared leadership fail to capture the importance of artefacts of the situation, such as organizational routines and tools. This approach reflects the influence of activity theory (Engeström, 2000), distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995) described

earlier, and social constructionist thinking (Dachler and Hosking, 1995; Hosking, 1988).

When interactions and the situation are taken into account – this is distributed leadership – without these it is only shared leadership. The aspects of the situation referred to go beyond contingency theories of leadership in which the situation and objects within it constitute a passive recipient of the actions of leaders. Instead, this model sees aspects of the situation such as a ‘routine’ like ‘the Breakfast Club’ – a weekly informal meeting of teachers – or a ‘tool’ such as the data generated on student literacy – as actively constituting and shaping leadership practice. This is a reciprocal relationship rather than a uni-directional one. Spillane uses the metaphor of a couple dancing to explain this. One could not understand the dance by considering the individual actions of both individuals separately but the dance could be understood as happening between them. In the same way the dance could not be understood as being separate from the music being played. The music is not simply a passive agent but constitutes an element of the dance itself. A critical point delineating these literatures and the conceptualizations of shared and distributed leadership they advocate, depends very much on how the two ‘dancers’ are theorized. Are they two entities with discrete knowing minds over which they have sovereign access when requested? Or can we only understand them by exploring their social interactions and focus on the meanings they give to their dancing activity and pay attention to the social, political and cultural context in which their dance takes place?

Research Methods in the distributed leadership study in schools

This focus on distributed leadership practice seen in this way is that tasks are seen as being 'stretched over' a number of leaders through their interactions and aspects of the situation. For example, the successful management and improvement of levels of literacy within schools may be performed by a number of individuals rather than by one. Spillane's research considers a number of leadership functions as a subset of the overall task of effective teaching – these functions include, curriculum development, teacher development, student discipline, etc. The research examines how leadership practice in relation to these tasks is actually enacted.

A wide range of research methods are deployed in order to provide as comprehensive a view as possible of actual leadership practice to implement these tasks. Thus data about the outcome measures of the performance of leadership functions, such as literacy scores over a three monthly period, provide not only a benchmark for research purposes but are considered an aspect of the situation that constitutes how leadership is practised. This is a very strong aspect of the research process – a focus on actual leading or leadership practice and an analysis of the possible factors that influence that practice. The use of diagnostic tools thus leads to designed improvements. Thus the method of enquiry involves using a number of 'mediational' methods, such as Experienced Sampling Methodology (ESM), social network analysis, Daily Practice Log, End of Day Log, as well as observations and semi-structured interviews all of which are deployed. This approach attempts to provide rich descriptions of actual practice in particular contexts that are task specific.

Research questions in the distributed leadership study

Spillane structures his research around 'who' and 'how' questions. The first question is 'who takes responsibility for leadership work? At most schools there are between three and seven designated formal leadership roles that are responsible for carrying out a range of leadership functions including student discipline, curriculum development, material selection, teacher development, and school improvement planning. Spillane suggests that 'followers' – those not designated as holders of formal leadership roles such as teachers and other school support staff – also contribute to leadership. The distribution of who performed leadership tasks among formal and informal leaders was found to be influenced by a number of factors – school size, the leadership function or routine, school size, the subject matter, the type of school and the development level of the leadership team.

'How' questions are based on a series of related questions; 'How are these responsibilities arranged?' 'How do these arrangements come to pass?' and 'How do individuals get constructed as individual leaders?' Spillane suggests that in order to answer these questions, it is critical to analyze leadership practice at the collective level. To do this Spillane proposes the concept of heedfulness (Weick and Roberts, 1993). As Spillane explains, 'heedfulness describes the way in which a set of behaviours is performed: groups act heedfully when they act carefully, intelligently, purposefully and attentively' (Spillane, 2006, p.59). It is within this heedful interrelating that it is possible to identify how the group functions as a

collective. Based on this approach and using the wide range of research methods described earlier, three types of distributed practice are identified:

- *collaborated distribution*: this is a form of distributed leadership practice stretched over the work of two or more leaders who work together in place and time to perform the same routine. Spillane compares this to colleagues playing together in a basketball team.

- *collective distribution*: this is the same as above except that the leaders work separately, though interdependently.

- *co-ordinated distribution*: this is a situation in which the interdependence is based sequentially and one task is finished before another begins.

Numerous examples of the occurrence of these forms of distribution are outlined. These three are similar to Gronn's three kinds of conjoint agency. However, Spillane (2006) eschews the term 'conjoint agency' suggesting that it implies common goals. Instead Spillane prefers the term 'co-performance' which he claims allows for the possibility that individuals may work in proximity together on a task but may have conflicting goals.

Affective dynamics in distributed leadership

In reference to the three types of distribution described above, Spillane says that one feature of collaborated distribution is noteworthy.

'Research on groups suggests that practices involving collaborated distribution may require much more attention to the affective dimension' (ibid. p.61).

He goes on to say that this is because 'situations involving collaborated distribution require leaders to co-perform in public, accentuating the affective dimension of interactions among leaders whereas situations involving collective distribution allow leaders to co-perform separately, potentially downplaying the affective *dynamic*' (ibid. p.61).

This is the full extent of the reference in this model to affective dynamics that may foster or inhibit the emergence or implementation of shared or distributed leadership. Despite, therefore, the promise of such 'thick' or 'rich' descriptions of the ways in which leadership practice is enacted across a school, there is little explication of the group level micro-processes that are involved. Micro-processes are described but only at the level of social interaction – a social constructionist approach.

This is not surprising since both the conceptual framework of Gronn and the empirical work of Spillane focus on a broad scope of organizational activities; this obscures any opportunity to explore the dynamics of micro-processes within a team. Spillane's focus on the interactions between leaders, followers and aspects of the situation is intended to provide insight into how actual practice can be improved. 'In so doing we explore whether and how things like better designed tools, new or reworked organizational structures, different kinds of leaders on

leadership activities might transform the interactions and thereby potentially improve leadership practice' (Spillane, 2004). These leadership activities include, for example, routines such as the Principal's monthly review of students' written work, or the design of a tool such as the students' 'writing folders' that are part of that routine. In this example, both routines and tools are related to the task of improving the written performance of a largely Hispanic group of students. The inter-relation of teachers, students and the Principal, as well as the routines themselves and tools such as the writing folders, all contribute to leadership practice. Changes to or re-design of these aspects of leadership can thus change the kinds of interactions that occur. Thus there is focus on the pragmatics of leadership practice, but little focus on both the actual dynamics that go on within a team and the kind of systemic relational dynamics that Heifetz suggests will be a necessary part of any response to an adaptive challenge of the kind described within both the shared and distributed leadership.

A focus on the pragmatics of improving leadership practices

In my view, exploring the pragmatics of the design of leadership routines and tools without focussing on the relational unconscious dynamics that are at play is to fail to address an essential aspect of what is entailed in shared or distributed leadership. This is because the unconscious group dynamics are both affected by those design issues and in turn affect them, and as such they represent an essential aspect of what occurs when leaders either try to implement shared or distributed leadership or create conditions for their emergence.

In conclusion, researchers both within the team-based shared leadership literature and the distributed leadership literature do not address directly the affective dynamics in groups and the micro-processes in which they are embedded. Within the shared leadership literature, human emotion is of suspect epistemological status. Indeed, researchers committed to an objectivist world view struggle to engage with process in groups (Uhl-Bien, 2006). It is only through exploring the actual lived experience of human actors within their contexts that accounts of affective dynamics in groups can be derived.

Within the distributed leadership literature, attention is paid to the social construction of emotion leaving the lived experience of affect within a group unavailable to psychological interpretation since the concept of a personal inner world is contested (Gergen, 2009). In his book 'The new work of educational leaders' (Gronn, 2003) Gronn points out that

'commentators have taken two broad, complementary approaches to emotions in organisations: the perspective of social constructionism [...] and a psychodynamic view point. The latter framework has provided a rich vein of research on the emotional basis of leadership' (ibid. p.132).

I argue that while a social constructionist view of emotion can complement a psychodynamic one – for example social constructionists helpfully emphasize how certain emotions or patterns of affect can be socially constructed within communities and organizations (Sandelands and Boudens, 2000) social

constructionist notions of the self are incompatible with a psychodynamic perspective on the individual. A psychodynamic view of the individual allows for individual experience but recognizes the source of individual experience as lying beyond the individual (Gomez, 1997), i.e. in the system and including other individuals such as team members or other parts of the organization. Through a psychodynamic lens it is possible to conceptualize group level phenomena in relation to shared and distributed leadership – the kind of systemic affect as referred to by Heifetz and Laurie (1999, 1997) when they describe how organizations could potentially experience systemic distress in response to adaptive challenges. Researchers in both the shared and distributed leadership literatures claim that these new forms of leadership are developing in response to changes in the external environment – adaptive challenges.

This issue of systemic affect is taken up in a book chapter entitled ‘What is the emotional cost of distributed leadership?’ (Huffington et al., 2004) and an article on schools leadership in 2007 by James, Mann and Creasy both of which are written from a psychodynamic perspective. These authors point out that attempts to extend leadership to all levels of an organization may unsettle existing role relationships and may lead to emotional responses across the organization which may undermine attempts to implement shared or distributed leadership. If a CEO begins to behave differently in order to foster distributed leadership then this may mobilize anxiety in so much as it places demands on individuals formerly in followership roles to take up their own leadership and to be exposed to the risks of failure.

Leaders must manage the uncertainties and ambiguities that a shift from this traditional perception to a shared or distributed one may entail. To fail to do so can lead to an explosion of emotion (James et al., 2007). These authors further point out, 'it is important to note that the dynamics referred to are systemic. Systems psychodynamics focusses not on each separate individual's feelings but on the collective emotions that are created unconsciously in the organization' (ibid. p. 612).

The implication of this analysis is that rather than shared or distributed leadership being an appropriate response to the increased complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty that adaptive work entails, a shift to these new forms of leadership may provoke levels of systemic distress thus accentuating the problem.

The gap in the shared and distributed literature

The team-based shared leadership literature reviewed suggests that the field would benefit from research on the micro-processes – and the unconscious group dynamics in which they are embedded – in which the sharing of leadership occurs. Various papers within this literature highlight the importance of affective dynamics that may prove either inimical to the emergence of shared or distributed leadership, or will encourage it. For example, the conceptual framework of Mayo et al. (2003) highlights the importance of relational dynamics through a focus on social network analysis that takes into account network concentration as well as measures of network density; however the model struggles to capture the fine-grained dynamics that would help explain what is actually occurring behind these

network measures. Mehra et al. (2006), also using social network analysis, explores the importance of mutual recognition between individuals attributed with leadership; but the model does not explore what might be going on in a team that would lead two individuals both attributed with leadership by others not to acknowledge one another. Cox et al. (2003) outline a conceptual framework of shared leadership in New Product Development teams and caution that vertical leaders need to provide 'leadership support' and 'leadership maintenance' to ensure an adequate balance is maintained between giving up and holding on too strongly to the formal leadership role; but this framework does not allow for the exploration of how these complex dynamics might actually be played out in teams as they work. The Group Exchange Structure model (Seibert et al., 2003) describes the dangers of scapegoating or defensive behaviours between sub-groupings in a team but is unable to provide actual descriptions of such relational dynamics as they unfold in a team. Burke et al. (2003) highlight the importance of factors such as 'open climate' and 'collective orientation' in a conceptual framework of shared cognition, yet there is no detail of what these will look like in terms of team process. Carson et al. (2007) theorize the importance of antecedent factors such as 'voice' and 'social support' in the emergence of shared leadership but not the methodological means to explore how such factors may be manifest in a team as they work. Above all, none of these models, because of their entity-based objectivist ontology, is able to theorize these affective dynamics as group level phenomena.

The distributed leadership literature based in the education sector considers leadership at all levels of a school. Despite a rich theoretical framework, the pragmatic focus on the artefacts of organizing pays insufficient attention to the relational dynamics that occur between individuals and groups. The 'affective dimension' is referred to but not explored. Gronn's 2002 model of distributed leadership theorizes a model of concertive units whose main characteristic is that they act with conjoint agency. Two processual elements of conjoint agency are theorized – synergy and reciprocal influence – but remain unarticulated largely because Gronn's focus on a diversity of institutional arrangements obscures the possibility of focussing on the micro-processes of group work.

Both literatures explain the recent emergence of shared leadership and distributed leadership as the result of the increased level of complexity and ambiguity in the workplace that has led to the emergence of changes in the division of labour. This increase in ambiguity and complexity is variously attributed to macro-level shifts in the environment, such as globalization, new technologies and de-regulation (Seers, Keller and Wilkerson, 2003) – as well as the transition to a knowledge-based economy (Carson et al., 2007). These all constitute what Heifetz refers to as adaptive challenges.

Thus construing shared and distributed leadership in this way, emerging as the *output* of an adaptive response to external pressure, carries with it the danger of not paying sufficient attention to the challenges of the adaptive *process*. Increasing pressure from external forces and the adaptive learning required in response, can induce systemic distress in organizations as they try to adjust (Heifetz and Laurie,

1999, 1997). The shared and distributed leadership literature reviewed here pays scant attention to such possibilities. In addition, and critically, in the same way that these meta-level pressures from the environment can provoke systemic affect, so too can implementing shared leadership in a team or distributed leadership across an organization raise anxiety as organizational members struggle to adapt to a new leadership style (James et al., 2007; Huffington et al., 2004). In such circumstances, shared and distributed leadership may compound rather than alleviate anxiety. The literature neither addresses the *process* of adaptive learning that these global meta-level environmental changes entail, nor considers the possibility that shared and distributed leadership may add to, rather than ameliorate, the effects of systemic anxiety in response to the demands of adaptive learning. This suggests that exploring the patterns of systemic affect in systems in which shared or distributed leadership are emerging or being implemented is an essential research focus. The literature supports this as an area for research.

The system psychodynamic perspective represents both a rich conceptual framework and a long history of practice for exploring these fine-grained dynamics as group level phenomena. Several authors within the shared and distributed literature cite this tradition but do not develop it further. Central to this framework is a way of understanding individual behaviour as a group level phenomenon and how this group level behaviour is linked to the outside world – the task environment in which an organization or group is functioning. As Miller (1989) describes, and as the main focus of the Tavistock Institute where this approach was developed:

'Our central theoretical and practical interest was and remains what we later came to term 'relatedness': the processes of mutual influence between individual and group, group and group, and group and organization, and beyond that, the relatedness of organization and community to wider social systems, to society itself.'
(Miller, 1989, p.7)

A system psychodynamic perspective offers important potential insights into the kinds of issues raised by the shared and distributed literature. Gronn acknowledges the potential value of this perspective:

'Arguably, more than writers from any other theoretical standpoint, psychodynamic theorists have provided more powerful explanations of how and why organisation members devise elaborate patterns of defensive and resistant emotional behaviour'
(Gronn, 2003, p.133).

As such I propose one main research question – operationalized into two sub-questions – that address the gap I have identified in the literature and are couched in the language of the systems psychodynamic tradition. I outline these questions and their primary focus in the section below.

The research focus of this study

Using the terms as they are broadly used in the literature, I propose a study of shared leadership rather than a study of distributed leadership. This is because while it is clear that various kinds of institutional arrangements from

organizational structure and job design will influence micro-level affective dynamics, I wish to focus more on the dynamics at a team level since these can be easily obscured by the complexities of organizational arrangements – this can be seen in the struggle of both Gronn and Spillane to focus on the processual elements of distributed leadership.

In addition, this study will focus on the team in an organization that will feel the full brunt of external adaptive challenges – the senior team. This is not intended as a means to extend the literature on senior teams *per se* but is instead a focus for the purposes of exploring what happens when an organization is experiencing adaptive challenges from without and attempts to implement shared leadership at a team level from within. There is no study within the shared leadership literature that addresses shared leadership in this way.

The following main research question is asked in order to address this gap:

How can the study of an attempt to implement shared leadership in an executive team, using a systems psychodynamic perspective, contribute to our understanding of leadership responses to adaptive challenges?

This question is operationalized in two separate questions:

RQ1. How does an attempt to implement shared leadership affect the group dynamics within a senior team?

RQ2. How do team members relate these experiences to their perception of the tasks that the senior team is charged with achieving?

Group dynamics in the systems psychodynamic tradition

The term 'group dynamics' in RQ1 refers to 'the psychoanalytic tradition of studying group phenomena in and out of the workplace. The contribution of this approach lies in its emphasis on the complex emotional forces which shape group life, the unconscious wishes and desires that influence group processes and the delicate networks of relationship that members form with each other' (Gabriel, 1999, p.114). By its very nature, a description of a group dynamic represents an attempt to produce interpretive theory about what is going on in a system.

The second research question (RQ2) refers to the importance of collecting data from a group as it works on its tasks. Two reasons justify this emphasis: Firstly, empirically, shared leadership is claimed within the literature to evolve in response to macro-level environmental pressures and related shifts in the division of labour (Gronn, 2003); secondly, conceptually, Heifetz's model of adaptive leadership is focussed on the mobilization of systemic distress in the face of an adaptive task. It therefore seems essential to collect data from a team as it works on what is perceived to be an adaptive challenge.

Both of these operationalized research questions focus on the *experience* of both individual group members and the group as a whole as they work on their

collective tasks in which they are being actively encouraged by the formally appointed leader to see themselves as leading the organization as a team.

Since the concept of group dynamics and associated patterns of systemic affect are originally rooted in concepts from the systems psychodynamic approach, the next chapter outlines the historical background and main theoretical concepts of the systems psychodynamic tradition. It describes the main conceptual framework on which my research methodology is based, and prepares the way for a description of the clinical fieldwork methods for data collection and analysis in a separate chapter.

Chapter 3

SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORY

Systems Psychodynamic Theory

Introduction

Having outlined the gap in the literature, the research question and its two operationalized derivatives, this chapter outlines the main elements of the systems psychodynamic perspective relevant to this study. It does not claim to represent a complete survey of what is a vast field. However, this chapter does offer a substantial overview of the main theoretical components of this field in order to provide the basis for the next chapter in which the research methods in clinical fieldwork based on a systems psychodynamic perspective are outlined. I will start with a brief description of the historical origins of the field. This chapter is then structured so that it addresses the main ontological debates – addressed at the beginning of my literature review – in the leadership literature about which so much that is salient is revealed in this study of shared leadership. In so doing, a number of systems psychodynamic concepts are introduced that form part of my interpretive framework for data collection and analysis. . I will also address briefly the work of Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz and Laurie (1999, 1997) to which frequent reference is made in this thesis.

The Historical Roots of the Systems Psychodynamic Perspective

The systems psychodynamic model was developed at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London, founded in 1946 with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation by members of the Tavistock Clinic. The intention was to establish a means of extending the pioneering work in social psychiatry carried out by

members of the clinic into the task of post-war social and economic reconstruction. The Tavistock Institute was established to do that.

From the beginning, the pioneering work of Kurt Lewin had a profound and lasting impact on both the formation and the professional identity of the Institute (Neumann, 2005). Lewin's emphasis on what he termed action research, based on his idea that the best way to understand an organization was to try and change it, was congruent with the new Institute's mandate to not only study social problems but to attempt to resolve them. This approach reflected a concern that traditional forms of scientific research might not help to elucidate the complexities of human collectives. The result was an emphasis on pragmatic applied social science that attempted to integrate theories across the social sciences with an application research model within organizations. The journal *Human Relations*, established in 1947 jointly by the Tavistock Institute and MIT where Lewin was based, was dedicated to this aspiration to integrate the social sciences.

Over the next 20-30 years, a conceptual framework and an applied action research model emerged into a body of pragmatic theory underpinned by what has broadly come to be termed a systems psychodynamics model. I will use the terms systems psychodynamic and psychodynamic interchangeably. Systems psychodynamics refers to a broad range of concepts with a multi-disciplinary source based on the social systems theories of Lewin (1950, 1947, 1946,) and relational forms of psychoanalysis (Mitchell, 1988), in particular the work of Melanie Klein (Klein, 1959, 1952, 1946).

The two main bodies of theoretical work that emerged from the Institute in this period are known as socio-technical systems design – an innovative approach to job and organizational design – and the ‘group relations’ model that combines British Object Relations theory with social system theory (Neumann, 2005). Group Relations ‘conferences’ (Miller, 1989, Rice, 1965) – temporary experiential educational events usually over several days – provide attendees with an opportunity to explore the nature of leadership, authority and group and inter-group dynamics in organizational life. I have attended and continue to attend such conferences as an attendee or ‘member’ as well as a staff member. Both socio-technical systems design and group relations integrate the psychodynamic concepts described below.

However, rather than outline in further detail the historical emergence of this perspective, I will structure the exposition of concepts from this approach around three related issues central to how shared and distributed leadership could be theorized. These three issues were taken up at the beginning of the literature review chapter as important ways to delineate the central ontological debates of the leadership literature. They are: the nature of the self; how relational dynamics can be understood; and the way process can be engaged with.

The self within the system psychodynamic tradition

Entity-based views of the self which dominate the shared leadership literature see the individual as ontologically complete in the sense that there is a clear division between mind and nature – individuals are in possession of a knowing mind and have access to the knowledge within that mind (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This view, predominant in the shared leadership literature, reflects the Cartesian split between mind and body. The notion of ‘I think therefore I am’ has implications for theory development since it eschews the experience of the body – particularly emotion – as a potential contaminant of any data that can be otherwise reliably obtained from the knowing mind of individuals. The research methodology that dominates the shared leadership literature and indeed the leadership literature more broadly, is one based on an epistemological stance that limits what can be known to what can be thought – leaders are theorized as heads without bodies (Ladkin, 2009, p.31).

In contrast, a social constructionist view of the self considers the existence of an inner psychological essence as suspect. In the view of Gergen, one of the leading authors of the social constructionist perspective, there is no isolated self or fully private experience; the self is a construction arising out of relational processes (Gergen, 2009). Knowledge therefore cannot reside within the heads of individuals but instead is to be found in the complex, evolving melee of social interactions (Hosking, 1988) and from which ‘organizing’ arises. Because emotion is also seen as a social construction, individual experience is not interpreted psychologically but more as an artefact of political, social and cultural contexts.

Object Relations and the self defined through relationships

The entity and social constructionist views of the self present a polarized world in which the self is either over-determined or its very existence questioned. Based on relational forms of psychoanalytic thinking, particularly Object Relations (Gomez, 1997) and the work of Melanie Klein (1959), a psychodynamic perspective sees the self as inherently relational. Far from being ontologically complete isolates, humans are seen as essentially relational beings. The 'objects' in Object Relations are the main caregivers, usually parents, the relations with whom colour all subsequent experiences of relating to others even though we may not be aware of how (Bollas, 1987).

Object Relations, in contrast to traditional Freudian psychoanalytic theory, sees connection with others and the risks entailed as a primary source of anxiety in individuals. 'Rather than seeing the human being as a system of biological drives, Object Relations places relationship at the heart of what it is to be human' (Gomez, 1997, p.1). Our need for others is central to how we come to know ourselves. By placing the longing for human relationship so centrally, Object Relations theory highlights the risks individuals face when reaching for, developing and sustaining human relationships (Phillips, 1995). It points to the ubiquitous presence of acceptance and rejection that are entailed when we try to form relationships. So the self, from a psychodynamic perspective, is shaped and formed in relationship to others.

The unconscious and intra-psychic functioning

A second core concept within the system psychodynamic approach to selfhood is that the self is subject to sources of energy and motivational forces that are not available to the conscious mind of individuals, even though behaviour and emotions are being affected (Neumann and Hirschhorn, 1999). This means that the relational dynamics in which we participate may be outside of our awareness. An implication of this is that individuals are subject to intra-psychic dynamics in which different parts of the self relate – the conscious with the unconscious aspects of the self. Thus a primary notion of psychodynamic work is that we are plural beings made up of many parts and not simply one ‘knowing mind’ whose views can be accessed in unproblematic ways, as is assumed within entity approaches. The engineering perspective of entity approaches assumes that one part of the self can administer another part in unproblematic ways. An Object Relations approach assumes that intra-psychic functioning will echo earlier formative relational dynamics – for example, an internalized parental voice or mood. From a shared leadership perspective, when a leader attempts to implement a form of leadership that contrasts with team member expectations, to one designed to engender a more collective shared leadership culture, this will affect individuals in ways they are not aware of and in unique and potentially very personal ways.

Splitting, projection and defenses against anxiety

Based on her clinical work with children, Klein evolved a theory in which the childhood relational experiences of the infant are formative of the adult relational

experiences of later life – later known as ‘object relations’. Klein’s theory of adult development posits that at first infants experience a polarized world of good and bad, pleasure and distress depending on when, if and how their needs are responded to. When the infant discovers that the source of these experiences is one and the same primary caregiver – ostensibly the mother – then anxiety is mobilized. A more simplified ‘split’ world of good and bad is threatened by this more complex nuanced world in which the mother is the source of both good *and* bad experiences. In order to reduce this anxiety the child develops a set of defense mechanisms designed to manage this inner turbulence. These early patterns of self-management are carried forward into adulthood and lead to powerful unconscious processes designed to defend against anxiety. At a group or organizational level these are called ‘social defenses’ – groups and organizations develop a wide range of unconscious strategies for reducing anxiety. Social defenses will be discussed in more detail in the next section on relational dynamics.

A team in which the leader is attempting to implement shared leadership may unsettle the relational field within the team – the stepping back from traditional decision making that shared leadership will entail will have implications for team members. Being asked to make decisions collectively alters the ways in which they are exposed to one another and thus elicits anxiety.

One of the ways we have of managing anxiety is to export it through a mechanism assumed to be universal in human psychic functioning – *projection* (Shapiro and

Carr, 1991). This is a process whereby aspects of our inner world are experienced as being external to us – for example we may see our weakness, anger, and confusion in others as a means of avoiding the anxiety of acknowledging these in ourselves. An individual 'A', a senior team member, who feels anxious about a shift to shared leadership – finding the Managing Director's new behaviour unsettling – may attempt to reduce anxiety through, for example, *repression* and *denial* of those feelings and instead projects this anxiety onto others, possibly one group member, say 'B'. B may be unconsciously chosen as a candidate for projection, because, for example, their anxiety is more visible and public and therefore possibly the more likely recipient of projected material. In the inner world of B, he or she may experience the new behaviour of the Managing Director as, for example, abandonment with an associated intensity of feeling that is visible to others. B may remain largely unconscious of this. Thus the process involves a 'splitting' of the inner and outer world of A into good and bad often with the bad being seen as a property of others, in this case B, and good being a property of ourselves. As a group level or collective phenomenon, this is known as *scapegoating* when 'negative' or denigrated aspects of the self – or the group – are projected. It is known as *idealization* when more 'positive' material is projected. These are therefore examples of social defenses – unconscious group level phenomena designed to reduce and thus defend against anxiety. Scapegoating provides a simplified and distorted picture of the world – a split world of good and bad, providing reassurance for those who can thus experience themselves as 'good' and the denigrated other as 'bad'.

Containment and shared leadership

While we may all engage in splitting and projection, how pervasive an aspect of an individual's functioning this becomes is a reflection of relational dynamics in our formative years. The parents' primary role in this developmental process is to provide *containment* (Phillips, 2007; Winnicott, 1971, 1965). Containment is the capacity to withstand the expression of distress and affect from others without retaliating. A mother effectively interpreting a child's crying is providing containment for the child's anxieties or distress. Heifetz's notion that leaders should provide a 'holding environment' for employees experiencing systemic distress in the face of adaptive challenges is an organizational level application of the psychoanalytic concepts of containment and counter-transference (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz and Laurie, 1999, 1997). A leader's attempt to introduce shared leadership while not being aware of the potential for such a move to unsettle the team and possibly provoke anxiety is probably less likely to succeed than one who pays attention to the evolving team dynamic in response to these shifts. In contrast, if a leader experiences responses from the team as hostile, and responds in kind, then this could be interpreted as a failure to contain anxieties mobilized as shared leadership is implemented.

The process of containment is no less important for the clinical fieldwork / consulting role that I will outline as part of my research methodology in the next chapter.

Relational dynamics from a system psychodynamic perspective

A systems psychodynamic approach to relational dynamics contrasts strongly with those from an entity and social constructionist perspective. From an entity perspective, leaders enter into relationships in order to influence others, exchange information and facilitate the achievement of mutual goals. What emerges is a picture of leaders being the architects of a web of inter-personal relationships designed for goal achievement (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Research methods are focussed on interrogating the minds of leaders to uncover their cognitions and perceptions and intentions in the context of inter-personal relationships. This has led to a focus on influence styles whose central constructs can be operationalized, measured and generalized to wider populations. In the shared leadership literature this has involved the study of leadership styles, such as transformational, charismatic or empowering leadership, that facilitate the emergence of shared leadership in a team (Pearce and Sims, 2002, Avolio et al, 1996).

The contrast between entity-based leadership theories and social constructionist approaches reflects a pre-Socratic philosophical debate, one related to Parmenides with an atomistic view of the world as made up of entities and the other associated with Heraclitus and worldview that sees reality as being in constant flow, flux and change (Chia, 2003) – processual view of the world (Bergson, 1913). A social constructionist view of relational dynamics consists of paying attention to this processual nature of reality by focussing on processes of inter-subjective relating between individuals in a particular social, cultural and political system in which

meaning is continuously emerging and being negotiated. The focus is not on leaders but on leadership processes which are constituted by and constitutive of relational dynamics (Hosking, 1988). How does something in a system come to be seen, experienced and spoken about as leadership? Once a phenomenon is described as 'leadership' how does this affect how other people see this phenomenon? As an example of this approach, Fletcher (2004) points out how certain leadership behaviours conducive to the development of shared leadership may not be construed as 'leadership' since such behaviours – collaborating, relationship building, empathising, developing dialogue – are often construed as 'feminine' and may disappear within the dominant 'masculinist' agenda of mainstream managerial narratives (Fletcher, 2004).

The embodied self

Relational dynamics, understood from a systems psychodynamic perspective, follow on from the concept of the relational self. Construing the self as relational means individuals are linked to others not only socially but also psychologically and systemically.

Individuals are psychologically linked because the relational self is fully embodied – rather than a discrete mind isolate as in entity-based perspectives. Phillips (1995) articulates some of the consequences of theorizing the self in this way:

...the mind-object is that figure in the internal world that has to believe and go on proving, usually by seeking accomplices – that there is no such thing as a body with

needs. It is a fiction invented to solve the problem of wanting, to make the turbulence disappear. The body is misleading because it leads one into relationship, and so toward the perils and ecstasies of dependence and risk; it reminds us of the existence of other people.' (ibid. p.93)

In order to reduce the risks entailed by following the impulses of our embodied selves, we develop unconscious strategies to hedge the risk of rejection, acceptance, abandonment, etc. The work of Klein (1959, 1952, 1946) suggests that relational dynamics of early childhood produce unconscious defenses against the anxiety engendered by these early formative experiences.

Relational dynamics and unconscious recruitment

Just how these dynamics are manifest in later life is illustrated in the work of Ruthellen Josselson in her book *Playing Pygmalion* (2007). Josselson suggests that these defenses are kept in place through a process of unconscious recruitment. 'We create our selves and our relationships in interaction with one another. We recruit people to be characters in dramas that we are enacting even as they recruit us to be characters in theirs' (ibid. p.2) This suggests that the adult self has within a relational schema that exist *a priori* to the current relational cohort of friends, colleagues, intimates, etc. We unconsciously bring people into our lives in order to fulfil aspects of our inner dramas. In the same way we are unconsciously recruited. Thus we are not just who we say we are but who others need us to be. Others may need us to bring forth one aspect of who we are rather than another. The purpose behind such unconscious recruitment will be the maintenance of

defense mechanisms against patterns of anxiety – patterns laid down during the formative phases of development.

Transference and counter-transference in relational dynamics

One such pattern of ‘recruitment’ relates to individual relationships to authority figures, including formal leaders in organizations. In a team in which shared leadership is being implemented, individual team members may experience each other and in particular the team leader in complex ways which may echo earlier formative relational schema. An individual whose formative experiences of parental authority were problematic may well, through a process called *transference*, project this archaic relational experience onto the leader as an authority figure. Such a person may also recruit such a person to their drama by unconsciously seeking out opportunities to work with a line manager likely to embody some of the unconscious dynamics to which this person is drawn. If the subordinate’s transferential relationship with authority is typically conflictual and the leader responds *counter-transferentially* – perhaps becoming more authoritarian – then the stage is set for a complex inter-personal and potentially group dynamic (Diamond and Allcorn, 2003). A leader who takes up their authority differently in pursuit of a shared leadership agenda will inevitably unsettle the existing relational field not only in how he or she relates to subordinates but how they are now left to relate to each other.

This account begins to provide some detail to the outline of the processual elements of conjoint agency suggested by Gronn (2002) in which he relied on a quote from Follet which describes how an individual within a concertive unit

'calls out something from the other, releases something, frees something, opens the way for the expression of latent capacities and possibilities.' (Follet, 1973, p.162)

A system psychodynamic perspective can give depth and breadth to such descriptions and provide a conceptual framework for exploring the kinds of affective dimensions which writers within both the shared and distributed literatures have not addressed so far.

These relational dynamics – the way in which others project onto us their need for us to be a particular way – can clearly be applied in organizational settings. A leader working in an organization that is suddenly facing an uncertain future may experience a shift in the intensity of projections as team members seek reassurance and the containment of their growing anxieties. An attempt to implement shared leadership may be quite different from what subordinates are looking for at this time.

The self-in-role

A concept that helps leaders in organizations to make sense of their experience in role – to discern the nature of these projections – is the psychodynamic concept of the 'self-in-role' (Lawrence, 1979). By interpreting personal embodied experience

not as a function of their personal psychologies but as a function of the context as well, the notion of the self-in-role provides a framework in which subjectively experienced emotion can be interpreted as meaningful beyond the individual. Therefore,

'A role is not a position that is assumed, much less one that is 'played'. Instead, a role provides the framework in which person and context meet.' (Shapiro and Carr, 1991, p.77)

For example, a leader shifting to a more shared leadership stance has an opportunity, using the concept of the self-in-role, to explore their subjective experience – their thoughts, feelings and emotions – as sources of data. This will require them to learn to discern material – such as anxiety – that originates largely from their own psychic world, from material likely to originate relationally to others and the system – including anxiety and emotionality from the system. By trying to evaluate their own experience in role, leaders may be able to discern the temptation to, for example, retaliate in the face of provocations from team members to behave in a certain way. Many of the conceptual frameworks of the shared leadership literature conceptualize a set of antecedent behaviours that will support the emergence of shared leadership; however, none of them was able to theorize these kinds of unconscious affective dynamics nor were they able to conceptualize shared leadership as a group level phenomenon. The concept of the self-in-role also applies to the consultant/clinical fieldworker role. The self-in-role

concept is also a bridging concept to the idea of the 'group-as-a-whole' – extending the idea of relational dynamics to the group level.

The group-as-a-whole

Having elaborated something of the relational dynamics of the relational self – how individuals are linked psychologically and not only socially – I will now outline how individuals are linked to their contexts systemically. This consists of understanding some of the psychodynamic concepts considered so far at a group level – for example projections as group level phenomena, not just inter-personally. This theoretical development within the systems psychodynamic perspective started with Lewin (1947) who first pointed to the 'Gestalt' properties of groups. A Gestalt perspective on groups refers to Lewin's insistence on studying groups as wholes rather than the sum of the individual behaviours of group members:

'...there is no more magic behind the fact that groups have properties of their own, which are different from the properties of their sub-groups or their individual members, than behind the fact that molecules have properties which are different from the properties of the atom or ions of which they are composed.' (Lewin, 1947, p.8)

Insight on the potential unconscious relational dynamics that manifest as group level processes – as social defenses – was then developed through the work of

Wilfred Bion, whose theory of group processes integrated systems thinking with psychoanalytic theory for the first time (1961).

Based on his clinical work with groups, Bion postulated that at any one time a group is working on two levels. On one level a group can be working on its assigned task, to which extent Bion suggested it is a 'sophisticated' or work group, while on another level, and at the same time, the group can be mobilized by unconscious irrational processes. When caught up in these irrational processes, a group works as if any one of three assumptions were true. These 'basic assumption' groups work as if the group were facing an external or internal threat (e.g., a fight-flight response), as if the creation of a pair could save the group (e.g., pairing), or the group acts as if it is dependent on a particular individual or idea (i.e., dependency). Bion also suggested that individuals contributed to these dynamics unconsciously. The purpose of basic assumption behaviour is to provide a social defense against emotional turbulence engendered by the demands of the task. In the work of Heifetz, which will be considered below (p.135), this emotional turbulence is referred to as systemic distress – group level patterns of systemic affect that must be managed for adaptive learning to occur (Heifetz and Laurie, 1999, 1997).

Bion's assertion of the existence of powerful unconscious group level dynamics conceptualizes the kinds of dynamics only alluded to in the shared leadership and distributed leadership literature. The behaviour in a group in which a basic-assumption fight-flight dynamic is operating is not driven by a realistic assessment

of the threat posed by changes in the external environment. Instead reality is distorted in a collective unconscious attempt to reduce anxiety and thus forms an effective social defense. The fight-flight basic assumption behaviour may lead to an overemphasis of the threat and as a result an unhelpful curtailment of the action that might lead to collaboration through, for example, strategic alliances. Thus the unconscious group level dynamic may undo the best attempts to learn adaptively. Similarly, if the behaviour in a group is partly driven by basic assumption dependency, then a leader who resists the pull to behave like a traditional 'top-down' leader in the hope of creating a culture of shared leadership, may well unsettle a team by undermining the unconscious dependency dynamic (James et al., 2007). These dynamics can be very sophisticated. For example, such a team may develop a set of tasks on which they will work collectively and from the outside appear to be working vigorously on these tasks. But time passes and in fact the tasks seem to not get done. The anxiety rises as the lack of effectiveness is unconsciously registered but not articulated openly. The team then begin to criticize their subordinates who they feel should be responsible for getting these tasks done. Team members feel strongly connected as a team when critiquing these middle managers, projecting all anxieties about incompetence onto them. To the extent that the team has created a scapegoating dynamic, and to the extent that the team is convinced it is working well on its tasks, discounting any evidence to the contrary, this group is engaged in basic-assumption fight-flight behaviour – the enemy are the middle managers. It is an elaborate social defense against anxiety.

Relational dynamics such as these are systemic – i.e. group-level phenomena – they represent an over-simplification of reality since the purpose is not to see clearly but to reduce anxiety.

Boundaries, primary task and primary risk

The notion that groups attempt to export turbulence and import order (Miller 1993a) reflects ideas of individuals, groups and organizations as Open Systems based on the work of biologist Bertalanffy (1950). Using the organism as a metaphor from biology, individuals and organizations survive through a constant process of exchange of materials across the ‘membrane’ or *boundary* of the organization. Leadership functions at the boundary, mediating between the outside and inside to ensure the organization has all it needs to survive and thrive (Miller, 1997). Important boundaries in an organization relate to time and space and behaviour. Are time boundaries adhered to or are they slack? Are they too rigid? What are the physical boundaries of the organization? Are customers kept at a distance or seen as close partners? Is there a strong demarcation between groups within the organization in terms of how status is marked? What kinds of behaviours are tolerated? These are some of the many questions that can be asked about boundaries. Under anxiety, boundaries can be fantasized (Hirschhorn, 1990) – customers can be imagined as distant and passive as a means to reduce anxiety related to increasing customer demands. This would represent a distortion of reality and relationships.

Another related concept when we think of organizations as Open Systems is that of the *primary task* – what does this organization exist to achieve? (Miller, 1989).

However, more recently the concept of the *primary risk* has been articulated (Hirschhorn, 1999) to describe a situation in which it is not clear what the primary task is or should be – what is the strategy and vision of the company? Senior managers may deny their feelings of anxiety in relation to choosing from a number of possible primary tasks. The anxiety of choosing a strategy is referred to as the primary risk an organization faces. In the case of shared leadership in which an organization is facing an adaptive challenge, team members may feel anxious about having to confront each other about strategic debates and prefer instead that the formal leader makes decisions of a strategic nature. A leader of a senior team hoping to implement shared leadership may benefit from considering the possibility that a dynamic may emerge related to the primary risk of articulating a direction for the organization.

Social defenses against anxiety

If a leader fails to pay attention to issues related to primary risk then a team may create unconscious strategies to reduce anxiety. The notion of social defenses, already mentioned, was elaborated by the work of Jacques (1955) and Menzies (1960). Jacques suggested that organizations can serve as places where individuals unconsciously seek to have their defences maintained. All kinds of organizational arrangements – work processes, structures, cultures and norms – can serve on the surface as the proper means of conducting work but also serve as social defenses designed to protect individuals and groups from anxiety. As in the

example of the senior team scapegoating middle managers, several routines and procedures for co-ordinating the work of the senior team and then delegating this work to middle managers are put in place – all represent social defenses for the senior team against anxieties related to their own incompetence. In a similar way, Menzies (1960), in her pioneering study of nursing practices, showed for the first time how certain procedures served to protect staff from the anxieties of dealing with the understandable distress of working with patients. Routines were found to instrumentalize the relationship between nurses and patients and allow a distancing from the powerful emotional experiences of tending those who are suffering. Menzies was able to highlight for the first time how the organizational tasks that individuals are engaged in can serve to induce anxiety.

Adaptive versus technical challenges – the work of Heifetz

An important corollary to the idea of institutionalized social defenses is the notion that these defenses can form in response to a particular kind of challenge. Rittel and Webber (1973) distinguished between wicked and tame problems in organizational planning. Grint (2005) applied these ideas to leadership: tame problems have available solutions and are associated with management, whereas wicked problems are less amenable to solution as they have no obvious answer – these are associated with leadership. Heifetz (1994) developed a similar notion – distinguishing technical from adaptive challenges. He describes technical challenges in the following way:

'For example, a car breaks down and a mechanic, an authority on fixing cars, is called in. A child breaks her arm and an orthopedic surgeon, an authority on fixing arms, is asked to set the bone, A social security check fails to arrive, and a local politician is called to "work the bureaucracy" for her constituent' (ibid. p.72)

These are all problems for which a solution exists within the range of existing knowledge or resources. He contrasts these kinds of technical problems with adaptive problems.

'For many problems however, no adequate response has yet been developed. Examples abound: poverty at home and abroad, industrial competitiveness, failing schools, drug abuse..' (ibid. p.72)

After presenting this list of potential adaptive challenges, Heifetz adds, "These are the times for leadership" (ibid. p.72). In a 1997 Harvard Business Review article Heifetz and co-author Laurie described adaptive challenges that organizations face. "We see adaptive challenges when marketing has difficulty working with operations, when cross-functional teams don't work well, or when senior executives complain, "We don't seem to be able to execute effectively." (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997, reprinted 2001, 'Best of HBR' p.4)

This model relates to both shared and distributed leadership that are positioned as adaptive responses to external challenges (Gronn, 2003; Pearce and Sims, 2002,

Avolio et al, 1996; Barry, 1991). Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz and Laurie (1999, 1997) point out that adaptive work creates systemic distress in the organisations going through it. This idea provides a link to the shared and distributed leadership literatures by conceptualising the space between adaptive challenge and adaptive response as not straightforward. It suggests that collective learning may be central to leadership (Day, Gronn and Salas, 2004). This is in contrast to the upbeat tone of the shared and distributed leadership literatures that propose shared leadership in particular as a solution to the new complexities of the workplace. At the same time Heifetz's notion of systemic distress also makes a link to the systems psychodynamic literature in which the emotional responses of individuals facing anxiety is understood as a group level or systemic concept.

It is these two main ideas from Heifetz that this study adopts and makes reference to. Other aspects of Heifetz's conceptual framework – a series of practitioner-focussed approaches to facilitating adaptive work is not further developed in this study. This is because these concepts are rooted in the systems psychodynamic literature and as such this study will focus on this literature as it is based on first principles rather than on the more practitioner led model of Heifetz's work.

This outline of a range of psychodynamic concepts provide depth and breadth to notions of relational dynamics, especially the ways in which such dynamics can be construed as group level constructs and applied to the analysis of shared leadership that developed during the review of the literature. As well as providing a conceptual framework for addressing shared leadership, it also presents an

alternative perspective on leadership that presents an alternative to the polarized positions of entity versus constructionist perspectives.

Turning now to a final issue – that of how process can be engaged with – this relates not only to how shared leadership could be conceptualized but more directly with how it can be researched.

Engaging with process from a systems psychodynamic perspective

‘I contend that we have little understanding currently of these relational dynamics because the vast majority of our existing studies have neglected to focus on process’ (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This ‘neglect’ is the inevitable result of a paradigm in which knowledge claims are oriented toward measurable universalist forms of knowledge. Entity-based studies refer to process but do not examine it. When it is addressed, it is to obtain snapshots of perceptions of organizational members at a point in time compared with similar data at a different point in time. These data are based on responses to questionnaires and surveys. Engaging with process requires a more dynamic interaction within a social system as actors engage with one another in the flow of work.

Social constructionist methodologies advocate such an approach but eschew interpretation based on either individual or group level psychological concepts. Instead the focus is on how meaning is attributed and negotiated through social interaction embedded within particular contexts (Uhl-Bien, 2006). A social constructionist view acknowledges that process in organization involves valuing

and that as a result affective issues will arise in the course of change. For example, some people will perceive the changes entailed in sharing leadership positively while others will see them negatively. *'Organizing processes have an intrinsically emotional or affective texture which may be positive or negative'* (Hosking and Fineman, 1990, p.586). By paying attention to the way certain experiences are labelled and built into organization- wide narratives, social constructionist approaches reveal important aspects of organizational process. The presence of affective dynamics is acknowledged with emphasis placed on the way that certain emotions and modes of expression may come to be accepted or sanctioned within particular cultural, political or social contexts (Hosking and Fineman, 1990). However, there is little conceptual richness applied to the ways in which individual subjective experience might be linked to the systems of which they are a part. The ontological status of the individual is questioned to the degree that internal psychologies are often eschewed. These kinds of relational dynamics remain the province of the systems psychodynamic approach, one which can illuminate many of the issues central to shared leadership.

A systems psychodynamic perspective approach to engaging with process is reflected in its commitment to a pragmatic body of theory based on actual work in organizations with a view to solving organizational issues. A statement by Miller (1989) throws light on this commitment:

'In the field of human behaviour no conceptual framework is complete without a statement of the role of the observer and his/her relation to the observed.' (ibid. p.8)

This is consistent with a relational view of the self since it is not possible to be part of an organization or group without being affected by and in turn affecting that system. The description of relational dynamics is similarly consistent with the idea that critical data as to the functioning of an organization are only available through direct experience of that system while it is working. That experience is a fully embodied one that includes an individual's emotional experience in role in that system. Thus an individual working within a systems psychodynamic tradition of fieldwork is usually working as a consultant whose role it is to assist organizations in their functioning – however that is defined. At the same time, this consulting role is an ideal opportunity to collect data on the fine-grained dynamics of the organization. Those data include being able, using the concept of the self-in-role referred to earlier, (p.128), to discern what aspects of one's subjective experience is resonant of the system and what aspect of that experience is more personal material.

The concern for objectivity is manifest within entity-based approaches by a commitment to research designs that simulate laboratory conditions or deploy survey methods. A systems psychodynamic approach, no less concerned for objectivity, is committed to by a disciplined attention to subjectivity as one enters a system for the purposes of research and consultation. To work in the present – in the very moment of being present in an organizational setting – and analyzing that experience in terms of its significance to the work of the organization, is at the heart of what is referred to as a 'clinical' approach to

research and consultation. The self-in-role is the heuristic tool used to monitor that experience (Lawrence, 1979).

The challenges of doing this will be addressed in the next chapter as I consider how a psychodynamic approach can be used to outline a research methodology within the system psychodynamic tradition. Although it is usual to ask the question about the type of data that need to be collected to address the research questions and only then to articulate a research methodology that will allow these data to be collected, I will follow a different order here. This is because the research methodology in general terms – the psychodynamic perspective – was proposed much earlier since the gap in the literature is rooted in ontological and epistemological considerations. As such, a research methodology was implicated in my analysis much earlier than would generally be the case. In the next chapter I therefore outline firstly a clinical fieldwork methodology for conducting research and then describe the kind of data that will be collected to address the two operationalized research questions on which my study is based. The chapter then goes on to describe the research design and methods used.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY, DESIGN AND METHODS

Methodology, design and methods

Introduction

Having outlined the main concepts within a systems psychodynamic framework, this chapter presents a clinical fieldwork methodology based on this perspective. It then describes the research design and methods used for this study.

The gap in the literature identified by the review in chapter 2 focusses on the exploration of patterns of systemic affect engendered in a team when there is an attempt to implement shared leadership as an adaptive response to environmental challenge. The choice to focus on shared rather than distributed leadership is based on two points.

Firstly, this choice reflects the difficulties encountered by researchers attempting to explore micro-processes across an organization as a whole – Gronn's analysis of 21 very different settings (Gronn, 2002) allowed for a breadth of analysis at the expense of depth. Spillane's focus on the pragmatics of how to improve practice (Spillane, 2006) leads to a focus on practical re-design of tools and routines based on 'heedful' practice with a largely social constructionist methodological focus.

Secondly, focussing on a single team using a systems psychodynamic research methodology, as this chapter will show, allows for issues outside the team to be addressed. Shared and distributed leadership are not mutually exclusive and their use here is simply a reflection of their usage in the literature. When an

organization faces adaptive challenges, then these will clearly have an influence on all organizational members. However, the team in an organization most exposed to such challenges is the senior team. I have therefore chosen to focus on a senior team in which the formal leader – the CEO or Managing Director – attempts to implement shared leadership. While there are many possible research topics in such a nascent field, the importance of the chosen focus of this study is to explore the as yet uncharted experience of team members for whom shared leadership may well foster an amplification of anxiety already present as the organization encounters adaptive challenges. The literature heralds shared leadership as a potential solution to the increased levels of complexity in the workplace. Little attention is paid to the ways in which shared leadership may exacerbate rather than ameliorate the anxiety entailed in adaptive learning.

I claim that it is commonplace for formally appointed leaders to aspire to have a team that ‘takes responsibility’ for running the company as a team and not to act as merely business or functional heads focussed on their own areas. In this way, I believe shared leadership or the intent to implement it, is not unusual. This is not a study of the various ways an organization could be structured to bring about a more shared distribution of leadership across an organization. It is a study of the experience of team members as the formal leader attempts to share leadership in the service of adaptive learning. The purpose is to explore the fine-grained relational dynamics that unfold in the process of sharing leadership.

In addition, despite the fact that commentators from both these literatures aspire to explore these fine-grained dynamics, they are constrained from doing so by their choice of research methodologies. This is the case from both the entity-based and social constructionist perspectives. I propose a systems psychodynamic perspective on shared leadership and an attendant research methodology as these provide a rich conceptual framework for addressing issues raised in my review of the literature. It will also provide an opportunity to explore key debates within leadership studies related to leadership ontology outlined at the beginning of the literature review (see pp.24-29). The use of a systems psychodynamic based methodology is also a response to the invitation to explore new research methodologies in this field. As Pearce and Conger state when reviewing the various methodologies employed for research into shared leadership, ‘..we encourage future research into alternative methodologies’ (Pearce and Conger, 2003, p.299).

The main research question that this study focusses on is:

How can the study of an attempt to implement shared leadership in an executive team, using a systems psychodynamic perspective, contribute to our understanding of leadership responses to adaptive challenges?

This question is operationalized into the following two questions:

RQ1. How does an attempt to implement shared leadership affect the group dynamics within a senior team?

RQ2. How do team members relate these experiences to their perception of the tasks that the senior team is charged with achieving?

System psychodynamics and a clinical perspective on fieldwork

The gap in the literature suggested by my literature review and addressed by my research questions, requires the close-up experience and exploration of patterns of systemic affect – largely unconscious – when leadership is shared in a team as it works within its organizational context on an adaptive set of tasks.

Theories about how unconscious processes in groups are linked to the organizational tasks and the context in which those groups work were developed as part of a diverse body of pragmatic applied social science theory that emerged in the post-war era at the Tavistock Institute. This body of theory integrates the systems theory with new relational concepts in psychoanalysis. This was combined with an action research model of intervention in organizations (Miller, 1997).

Schein's approach to clinical fieldwork is a form of action research. In defining what he means by a 'clinical' perspective to fieldwork he refers to individuals who take a role intended to *help* the system in which they are intervening. This includes psychiatrists, social workers, clinical psychologists and organizational

development consultants (Schein, 1987, p.11). The word clinical is also used to refer to individuals who have been trained in some way – these are not skills that can be simply picked up. Most of the examples he uses come from his own work as an organizational consultant using what he calls ‘process consultation’. This he suggests is hard to define since it is not about skills or techniques, but ‘more of a philosophy or a set of underlying assumptions about the helping process that lead the consultant to take a certain attitude toward his relationship with the client’ (Schein, 1988, p.5). Process consultation is not about being a content expert but about paying attention to *how* work is done rather than what work is done. A process consultant will negotiate access to the organisation with a client in order to work together to discover what the underlying issues might be that are causing problems. To work effectively as a process consultant requires taking a clinical stance to that experience – this requires paying attention to the ‘self-in-role’ described in the last chapter. From the experience of working in the system with the client a lot of data will be available in terms of feelings, emotions and thoughts that can provide data about the system to be helped. The focus on such an approach is related to a belief that ‘access to significant aspects of organisational functioning was only possible during processes of change in which the research worker was involved directly in the equivalent of a clinical role’ (Miller, 1995, p.29). As Kurt Lewin, famously put it, ‘the best way to understand a system is to change it’ (Miller, 1995, p.29). This is the basis of the clinical fieldwork approach combining intervention with research.

'Clinicians must therefore "intervene" with diagnostic or provocative questions, with interpretations, suggestions, or recommendations in order to elicit a response from a client. The nature of that response then becomes primary diagnostic data for determining what may really be going on.' (Schein 1987, p.29)

The nature of this response includes the transferential and counter-transferential responses discussed in the previous chapter (see p121). In this case it refers not to the dynamics between leader and subordinates but between members of the organization being consulted to and clinical fieldworker in the role of consultant-researcher – these dynamics can provide important data for analysis (Diamond and Allcorn, 2003; Gilmore and Krantz, 1985). This model of clinical fieldwork provides, as I will argue below, a framework for engagement and a research agenda for addressing systemic affect in groups engaged in adaptive work – and thus address the two operationalized research questions. My choice of a clinical fieldwork methodology also addresses the issue of access and the nature of the data I wish to collect. Gummesson (1999) describes access to reality as the researcher's number one issue. Gaining access to a senior team for the purpose of exploring their group dynamics is problematic. As Schein (1987) points out, ethnographers often have difficulty gaining access to how top level decisions are *actually* made since their access, based on a research agenda, is often deemed of insufficient value to the organization to allow for full access to the workings of a senior team.

Hirschhorn (1990) describes the advantages, from a research point of view, of entering an organization as a clinical fieldworker or consultant – to use his term –

in an organization. Firstly, as clients pay consultants they are motivated to cooperate with them. As stated already, consultants are also more likely to gain the kind of access not open to researchers. In addition, 'consulting encounters are effective as research tools because they are both real and artificial events' (ibid. p.245). They are artificial because consultants often work with clients outside normal work boundaries – special groups, off-site meetings, etc. – but real to the extent that clients bring all their subjective experience of their organizational issues to the encounter with the consultant. As with therapy, it is the transference of the troubled relationships of the past onto the relationship with the analyst that provides the material for potential healing. In the same way, the emotional responses that arise in a consultant within the relationship with the client are likely to represent important sources of data about relationships within the client system. If, as a consultant, one is left sitting in reception for an hour or alternatively ushered in with a great fanfare, this should be seen as data that say something – as yet unknown – about the organization and its presenting issues. This simple example points to the 'epistemological value of a feeling' (ibid. p.246). How a clinical fieldworker in the role of consultant is feeling provides the experiential basis for the meaning of what is occurring in a particular context. If a consultant is sitting in a room with a senior team in which the Managing Director is attempting to implement shared leadership, feelings of light heartedness arising from the team banter will have epistemological value – the consultant may experience a wish to laugh, to join the team, or to shout or to scold the team. All these feelings and fantasies have potential epistemological value, the meaning of which may not be clear at the time. It is also possible that a similar period of

banter at a different time will be experienced very differently because the context is different.

While researchers who have conducted surveys and interviews may struggle to see the coherence in two potentially contradictory points of data – by sensing the emotional resonances within a system, a consultant is linked to the process by which individuals within that system actively create their *own* coherence from the contradictions – they look for this coherence in meaning since they ultimately intend to act. *'The feeling links meaning and intention.* By knowing what I feel, I know what the situation means, and then I know, in light of my intentions, how to act.'*'* (ibid. p.246).

The challenges to the consultant working from this perspective are manifold. Events are interpreted rather than counted and as such this introduces a strongly subjective element to the research. Unlike field researchers conducting other kinds of research such as interviews or observation, or even ethnographers, consultants or clinical fieldworkers working from a system psychodynamic perspective must do more than just try to record their biases. The unconscious cannot be made conscious on demand. As Hirschhorn describes:

'The unconscious is observed only when it acts in the 'here and now' of an encounter. At best, consultants must entertain an openness toward its effects; they must not try to prevent their characteristic mode of feelings from erupting but rather try to interpret their feelings by linking them to the encounter at hand. Consultants learn

this, however partially, only by coming to accept their defined and therefore limited ways of being in the world.' (ibid. p.249)

Tracking systemic affect in an organizational setting in the ways described above requires, as Schein points out, 'a high degree of training and experience, in addition to a desire to be helpful' (Schein, 1987, p.22). A key skill is the capacity to discern to what extent the subjective feelings of the researcher are of the system and to what extent they are more personal using the heuristic concept of the self-in-role as a means by which the clinical fieldworker can distinguish this kind of data.

Descriptive, explanatory and interpretive levels of data analysis

Using the self-in-role as a heuristic forms the basis of building successive layers of data. Interpretation within the clinical fieldwork perspective is different from within the qualitative research tradition. Interpretation in the clinical tradition is that moment when the practitioner in their clinical role – psychiatrist, psychotherapist, consultant, etc. – links data observed to some kind of explanation that relates to theory. This link to theory is not always explicit. These 'observed data' can include a feeling within the clinician – sleepiness, irritation, grandiosity, rejection, loneliness, anxiety, playfulness – or something said or unsaid, actions taken or not taken. Interpretation in this case arises as the data spark a thought in the clinician that may lead, with the help of theory, to an interpretation. Phrases such as 'I think this is going on because..', 'this might mean...', or 'I think we can understand this by...' are used to preface the interpretation. Another phrase used within this tradition for this kind of interpretation is 'working hypothesis'. It is not

intended as a final or complete statement of what is occurring but is offered to the client system as a provisional idea or explanation for consideration, refinement and development. Knowledge claims from this interpretive stance are always provisional; they are offered to others within a system for the purpose of deepening understanding about unconscious group processes related to task. I will use the term 'working hypothesis' and hypothesis in my chapter on interpretive data analysis to refer to this kind of provisional assertion about the possible meaning of the descriptive and explanatory data.

Interpretation, as understood within qualitative research, requires a tighter coupling – an 'audit trail' between data and explanation – with the steps from data collection to inference and theory building, whether descriptive or explanatory, carefully laid out so that it can be scrutinised by others (Neumann, 2012). In order to provide a clear 'audit trail' from data to interpretation, I distinguish three types of data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1984). The first is descriptive data, i.e. a first round of coding of data into a rich description of 'strands' of teamwork associated consistently with patterns of systemic affect. This is the outcome of data collection and synthesis in order to answer the two research questions. It is supplemented by explanatory analysis that outlines the psychodynamic concepts most likely to explain the emerging pattern of systemic affect, for example, basic assumption 'fight-flight' or 'scapegoating' or 'denial' – systems psychodynamic concepts covered in the previous chapter – without a clear sense at this stage of 'why' a particular dynamic may be emerging. With the benefit of more time, as dynamics emerge and more data can be collected, then the next level of data

analysis produces interpretive theory – a series of ‘working hypotheses’ which is more strongly linked to systems psychodynamic theory. Chapter six of this study is dedicated to presenting this level of data analysis.

Based on this analysis, it is now possible to consider the key question about the kind of data that would need to be collected in order to address the two operationalized research questions.

The kind of data to be collected to address the research questions

The main research question that this study focusses on is:

How can the study of an attempt to implement shared leadership in an executive team, using a systems psychodynamic perspective, contribute to our understanding of leadership responses to adaptive challenges?

The two operationalized research questions are:

RQ1. How does an attempt to implement shared leadership affect the group dynamics within a senior team?

RQ2. How do team members relate these experiences to their perception of the tasks that the senior team is charged with achieving?

In order to address these two questions, the following data will need to be collected.

(i) *Data from the actual processes of a senior team at work:* To capture group level phenomena requires proximity, involvement and relationship to the system. This means experiencing, not only observing. It involves the subjective experience of flows of affect, energy, between and among group members as well as the clinical fieldworker and drawing inferences from them. Group level phenomena may be, for example, two individuals discussing a topic that might reasonably be expected to involve everyone; it is not the silence of other group members as an observable social fact that is important but the experience of the silence as being noteworthy – of epistemological value – to either the clinician or to some or all of the team members. What is not of concern is an analysis based on a standardized rule that says ‘when two people speak and others are silent then it means X’.

Collecting data about these group-as-a-whole dynamics involves *selectivity*; there are a number of dynamics that could be noted – and therefore *reflexivity* – a rigorous self-monitoring of the researcher to explore the motivations behind what is paid attention to and what is not and why.

The properties of these group level phenomena are that they are *systemic* – not merely a function of individual psychologies; they are *contextual* and therefore *novel* – whatever meaning can be ascribed will be related to the unique configuration of events at that moment; similarly, they are *psychodynamic* –

reflecting unconscious processes in a constant state of flux; and *holistic* – they can be understood at multiple levels of analysis. Knowledge in such a system is always provisional, with no probabilistic statements being possible.

(ii) *The experience of the clinical fieldworker:* The researcher, as a clinician, takes an interpretive stance with regard to data collection (Shapiro and Carr, 1991) in which the essential skill is differentiating ‘those feelings that derive from without from those that derive from within’ (ibid. p.82). This includes paying attention to bodily sensations of temperature, numbness, tingling, and flows of energy; it includes emotional reactions – joy, irritation, excitement, surprise, sadness – and thoughts and fantasies. All of these are available for analysis as potential data that say something about the system and could therefore form a part of descriptive data, explanatory or interpretive levels of analysis.

(iii) *Task related:* Heifetz’s notion of systemic distress in the face of adaptive challenges requires the collection of data related to how individuals and the team as a whole experience working on their tasks as a senior team. This includes recording self-perceptions they may make, as individuals or as a collective, about their work, along with data derived from documents and minutes of meetings that may provide such accounts. The collection and analysis of such documents allows for the monitoring of progress on tasks that the team has set itself.

(iv) *Reactions to interpretations, recommendations and interventions:* The outcomes of engaging in an iterative exploration of an ongoing set of emergent hypotheses with the organization can provide additional data as well as validation.

These can take the form of formal presentations, written reports, as well as the informal sharing of emergent ideas about what may be going on. The clinician, in attempting to help the organization through interventions, suggestions and recommendations, will elicit a response from the organization. 'The nature of that response then becomes primary diagnostic data for what may really be going on' (Schein 1987, p.29)

(v) *Patterns of behaviour and related affect*: If the same group member speaks after another group member on several occasions and the content of the contribution is similar – to support or challenge the contribution of the other group member – then this may be noteworthy and should be paid attention to. If two different group members subsequently make eye contact in what appears to be a non-routine way, or can be seen talking during coffee breaks, this too may be worthy of attention. If the selection for sub-group work creates a distribution that is significant, given the topic, then this may also be noteworthy. The meaning of such patterns of interaction will not, however, be limited to discussions of individual personalities but will be understood as representing group level phenomena.

(vi) *Data over time – a longitudinal study*: The kind of work in which a senior team engages is necessarily implemented over several months. In order to assess how the patterns of systemic affect are related to the team tasks requires time. What may appear to be functional at the time may transpire several weeks later to have quite another meaning.

This kind of data will address the two research questions outlined and the clinical fieldwork research methodology described provides the means by which such data can be collected. The next section outlines my research design and data collection methods.

Research design and methods

Introduction

Having outlined the clinical fieldwork research methodology based on a systems psychodynamic approach and described the kind of data that will need to be collected in order to address the two operationalized research questions, this section outlines the research design, site selection and methods used to collect data. In order to answer these questions I have chosen to select a single case study of a company which (i) faces adaptive challenges as defined by the organization, (ii) has a senior team created in order to address these issues and (iii) is a team in which the formal leader articulates a wish for the team as a whole to lead the organization. It also needed to be a company to which I could gain access to carry out a longitudinal study over several months. This is because the kind of data needed to address the two operationalized research questions requires a considerable time to collect.

It is not a requirement that the leader uses the term 'shared leadership'. Instead I claim that when formal leaders aspire to have their teams provide leadership to the organization on the basis that the formal leader alone cannot do it, then this

represents the wish to implement shared leadership. Such a description is consistent with definitions of shared leadership in the literature.

I will now outline the background to my choice of a single case study research method design.

Choice of case study research

Buchanan (2012) states that ‘while case studies can be pre-defined in focus and scope, they can also be emergent, and self-defining’ (ibid. p.3). Case studies can emerge in unexpected ways from a single conversation. Buchanan’s paper ‘The logic of political action: an experiment with the epistemology of the particular’ (1999) as well as presenting a study of organizational politics enquires into what, if anything, can be learnt from a single case study. Buchanan points out that questions of ‘what is happening here?’ can be formulated *after* the case has been documented and that many subsequent questions emerge retrospectively.

The unit of analysis for a case study can be an *organization* such as the study of the Challenger shuttle disaster (Vaughan, 1996) or the landmark longitudinal study of ICI by Pettigrew (1985). Case studies can also be *events* such as the shooting down of two Black Hawk helicopters in Iraq in 1994 (Snook, 2000) that covered an event lasting just eight minutes, or they can be *decision processes* such as the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962 (Alison, 1971).

The focus of this study is the single case of a senior team in an organization in which shared leadership is being implemented in the face of adaptive challenges.

The case covers a period from March 2008 to November 2009 but includes background data from July 2006 when I began working with the newly formed senior team.

Another perspective on the choice of a case study is the work of Yin (2009), who outlines five major research methods: experiment, survey, archival analysis, history or case study. He suggests three conditions for selection: the form of the research questions; the degree of control the researcher has over behavioural events; and the degree of focus on contemporary versus historical events.

The form of the research questions: In contrast to who, where and what questions, how and why questions suggest an explanatory rather than an exploratory study. They lend themselves to the use of case studies, histories and experiments (ibid. p.9).

The degree of control the researcher has over behavioural events: Since the main claims for shared leadership within the literature relate to the meta-level pressures in the external task environment, I choose to focus on an intact senior team on site.

The degree of focus on contemporary versus historical events: Since the opportunity to research a current senior team is a possibility, there seems no reason to choose a history as a research method. A history would not allow for proximity and

relationship to the ongoing system that would provide access to patterns of systemic affect as a team works adaptively.

The challenge then became one to identify a team working on an adaptive task and one in which the formal leader was attempting to implement shared leadership.

The next section outlines this selection and choice of research site.

Choice of this research site and the processes of data collection

Based on the notion that case studies can also be 'self-selected' emerging from opportunities and evidence (Buchanan, 2012; Yin, 2009), an opportunity presented itself in 2008 to have contact with a company in the recruitment industry facing generic adaptive challenges. These challenges included the retention of frontline and key managerial staff, weak internal processes and a problematic embedded internal culture as well as poor performance relative to competitors. The company name and those of organizational members are disguised as this was one of the conditions for permission being granted for this research study. This section outlines the background to site selection and subsequent data collection process.

The Company – Recco

Recco is a medium sized recruitment company based in the UK. A 2006 report by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation reported that there were 10,426 registered recruitment agencies in the UK, 56% of which were companies operating from a single site. Just over half of all agencies (53%) have between two and five staff. Most agencies cover both temporary and permanent recruitment.

The client company for this study has over 2000 staff and is active in both temporary and permanent recruitment. Like many recruitment companies, it is involved in a number of 'sectors' such as Accounting and Finance, Public Sector, IT, Legal, Marketing and Communication, and Project and Programme Management.

From 2003 – 2005 the company enjoyed rapid growth. However, during the later part of 2005, a number of concerns began to be expressed by the Managing Director relating to the growth of the company. Figures of % growth in gross revenue from 2003 – 2004 were 27%, from 2004 – 2005, 25% and were projected in 2006 to be 25% again. This did not materialise and in the early part of 2006 the Managing Director began to express concerns about the slowing performance of the company. In particular, concern was expressed about revenue growth relative to major competitors. The two largest competitors were regularly used as benchmarks for performance and are referred to in meeting minutes and in a communications document that went to all staff. In 2006 both these competitors enjoyed growth of 25% and 37%. Why, in a buoyant market in which competitors were making considerable amounts of money, was Recco beginning to languish? In addition to this there were concerns about the turnover of recruitment consultants – 43% when the industry average was just over 30%. The costs involved in addressing this retention issue in terms of training and sourcing new members of staff was only one concern.

There were several other related problems within the organization that were considered problematic in the early part of 2006 – these were later to appear as

‘strategic projects’, explained below. These problems were adaptive in nature in as much as they were deemed to be difficult to address with no obvious solution presenting itself. I was brought into the organization at a time when the overall performance of the company, relative to competitors as well as several issues related to the internal workings of the company, were identified as requiring urgent attention.

In early 2006 I was invited to meet the Managing Director to discuss the possibility that I might facilitate the first meeting of what was to be a newly formed senior team. In this first meeting, the Managing Director expressed clearly the intention that this team was to provide leadership to the organization as a whole. A statement of ‘core purpose’ for the team, created during its first meeting on 10 July 2006 was ‘to work as a leadership team to define the vision and be accountable for the formulation, execution and review of the strategy’.

Since shared leadership is not a widely used term, the public articulation of the intention that the team should provide leadership to the organization, represents intent to create a team environment in which leadership would be taken up by the team as a whole. What appeared, therefore, was an opportunity to explore the juxtaposition of adaptive challenges and an intended implementation of shared leadership within a consulting role that would provide me with the kind of access and thus the data that would allow for the kind of fine-grained dynamics hitherto unexplored within the literature to be elaborated.

The full extent of my work with this team started from its inception in 2006 until the end of 2009 at which time the company was bought. The result was that the senior team was dissolved acrimoniously amidst accusations of poor leadership. During interviews with representatives of the new owners, team members took the opportunity to speak of a 'leadership vacuum' that ultimately led to the Managing Director leaving the company in early 2010 two months after my work with the company had finished.

Having been trained several years earlier at the Tavistock Institute in London on a two-year Masters programme in Advanced Organisational Consultation as well as regular subsequent work as a staff member on dozens of leadership development programmes designed and run from system psychodynamic perspective, my stance on entering the organization in 2006 was a clinical one, as described in the previous chapter. I have also been a staff member on several internationally recognized Group Relations conferences that apply the systems psychodynamic model to understanding leadership, authority and group dynamics at the individual, group and inter-group level. The collection of data at this time was therefore related to my contracted work to design and facilitate a one-day meeting for the senior team. The team consisted of the HR Director; the newly appointed Marketing Director; the Chief Financial Officer; three Executive Directors with Profit and Loss (P&L) responsibility; the Executive Director Public Sector; Executive Director Legal Services; and Executive Director Commerce and Industry. In the latter part of 2008, a new Executive Director Accounting and Finance was hired. This brought the number of Executive Directors to four. With three

functional Directors – HR, Marketing and Finance – and the Managing Director, this makes a team of seven in 2008 increasing to eight when the new Executive Director joined. Although the Executive Director Accounting and Finance only joined the team formally in January 2009, she attended senior team meetings in November and December 2008.

Following the 10 July meeting in 2006, I was invited back to meet the Managing Director to discuss further work. Subsequently further workshops or off-site days were held in September 2006 which led to a much more intensive stream of work related to the adaptive work entailed in the five ‘strategic projects’ which the team had selected to work on. I had provided the methodology for this project work and was thus strongly identified with the projects. Each of these projects had a title and a sponsor within the senior team and a project team with members assigned from the next layer of management – 23 in total. My role was to meet with these teams and attend meetings with their sponsors to attempt support in the design and implementation of initiatives that would ‘close the gap’ between current and future measures of each project. The five phases of my work with the company from July 2006 to December 2010 are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Phases of work with senior team July 2006 - December 2010

July 2006 (1)	Nov 2006 – June 2007 (2)	July 2007 – Jan 2008 (3)	Feb 2008 – Oct 2008 (4)	Nov 2008 – Dec 2009 (5)
First meeting to facilitate first Away Day	Facilitate senior team meetings and strategic formulations	No longer work directly with the senior team but closely with the projects	Creation of Programme Management Group and reintegration with the senior team work	Spend one year focussing on the functioning of the senior team and its implementation of company strategy

The focus of my study – the longitudinal study of the senior team as the Managing Director tried to share leadership – consists of phases 4 and 5; i.e. between February 2008 and December 2009. Phases 1-3 provide background data for the study that helps to contextualize the subsequent 18-month study.

My data collection in phases 1-3 – July 2006 to early 2008 – consists of field notes from meetings with the Managing Director and the HR Director prior to the July 2006 team meeting, digital images of flip charts, notes from brief interviews with team members prior to the meeting, field notes from subsequent meetings with the Managing Director in order to design the next round of interventions, the writing of reports which offer synthesis, and in some cases hypotheses about emergent group dynamics and how they relate to team tasks. In addition my field notes from the experience of supporting the work of the various strategic projects provided background data on how managers from the layer below experienced the work of the senior team. From April 2008 I was again granted more access to the senior team and as such the opportunity for more proximity and relationship

meant that there was a chance to see the team in action in a way that had hitherto been more sporadic. I agreed with the Managing Director that I would continue to provide consultancy and was granted permission to use the opportunity to collect data for research purposes.

A longitudinal study - February 2008 – December 2009

This is the period of my formal data collection for this study. A key event in March 2008 led to the creation of a sub-group of the senior team in which all the change initiatives being driven in response to the adaptive challenges faced by the senior team could be reviewed and monitored – it was called the Programme Management Group. The creation of this group as well as the later access to the meetings of the senior team provided me with the kind of ‘access to reality’ that would allow me to address the gap in the literature on which I wanted to focus.

The Programme Management Group was created to bring together two streams of work that had become divergent and a source of conflict: one stream of work led by the Marketing Director and the other strongly associated with me – the work of the ‘strategic projects’. An occasional attendee in his role as non-executive director had described the projects and the other strategic work of the team as ‘a car crash waiting to happen’. The Managing Director decided to create a group where these two streams of work could be more integrated as well as providing a place where progress on all change initiatives could be monitored. These change initiatives were called ‘shared accountability’ tasks and were listed on a spreadsheet file that was referred to as ‘the Gantt chart’.

The creation of the Programme Management Group thus represented both an attempt to create shared leadership – a sub-group of the senior team working on behalf of the others – and a place where the experience of this attempt to create shared leadership through monitoring all the adaptive work for which the senior team held itself accountable – the shared accountability tasks – could be explored.

The Programme Management Group consisted of three permanent members from the senior team, the Managing Director, the Marketing Director, and the Executive Director Commerce and Industry – the only Executive Director not to be a sponsor of one of the five strategic projects. In addition, a rotating member from the senior team also joined the meetings. At any one time the Programme Management Group consisted of four members of the eight person senior team. I was a fifth member of the Programme Management Group in the role of external consultant.

Data collection process using clinical fieldwork from the systems psychodynamic approach

From June 2008 to October 2009 there were 57 meetings of the Programme Management Group during which I took written notes typed directly into my computer during the meetings. These meetings were between 60-90 minutes in length. I then wrote up formal meeting minutes directly afterwards as well as added further to my own notes. These field notes were based on a ‘two column’ approach. Recorded in column one are the events of the meeting, what was said, attendees etc., and in column two, my subjective experiences of the self-in-role in terms of emotions and thoughts related to my consulting role as well as short

‘analytical memos’ which form the basis of any interventions I might or might not make. Together I call these field notes ‘observational notes’ (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). This is very similar to the field notes used within the Tavistock tradition of data collection in organisational settings developed in the 1950s (Miller, 1995).

Once written up, the formal minutes were then sent round to all team members for acceptance or modification. The requirement that I produce a set of detailed minutes – often 3-4 pages representing a summary of our discussions and debates – was a useful discipline in ensuring I provided a balanced record of our discussions and the multitude of views expressed. These minutes were therefore written, together with my own notes taken during the meeting but not necessarily included in the final minutes, and constitute what I refer to as my observational notes. The short, analytical memos written to myself in ‘column two’, either prior to or just after an intervention, provide a record of the nascent inferences that I was drawing from data as they emerged in the meetings. These column two notes always included a commentary about what I may be bringing into the system from outside as well as the possible consequences of what I may see or not see because of my own ‘limited ways of being in the world’ (Hirschhorn, 1990) – my own unconscious processes. These notes were always supplemented by further writing immediately after the meetings of the Programme Management Group. This process is part of a data collection process using the concept of the self-in-role (Lawrence, 1979).

Once or twice a month I wrote a document that contained my associations and a synthesis of the data from the observational notes. These documents were free flowing in style and contained my early attempts at interpreting what might be going on in the system based on my observational notes. These documents, usually no more than one page in length, I refer to as theoretical notes. Data from these theoretical notes formed the basis of the interpretive analysis of the data I was collecting. They show the link between the data from the experience of the meetings and my associations and inferences drawn from these data over time. These theoretical notes provide an ongoing rolling data analysis, from which I draw in my consulting work to the team, as well as a rich source of research data. It was from an iterative process of engaging with the data from the meetings and the theoretical notes that the selection of what I refer to as 'data strands' emerged. These strands represent those issues that preoccupied the Programme Management Group and the senior team, and frequently appeared as formal agenda items. They all represent attempts at adaptive work. I will say more about these strands below.

In addition to attending the Programme Management Group meetings (48 out of 57), from January 2009, I was invited to attend all meetings of the senior team as an external process consultant with a brief to work on team effectiveness. I attended 10 full day meetings from 09.00 to 17.30. My field notes during these team meetings were written up as observational notes within 24 hours using the handwritten two column notes from the meetings – I therefore have ten sets of observational notes of up to 30 pages recording much of the discussions of the

meetings. I also wrote a short theoretical note for each of these meetings. In addition, two off-site events, and interviews conducted with team members as well as many one-to-one meetings with the Managing Director (see table below) provide rich descriptions of the Managing Director's experience as he attempts to create a team culture in which leadership is shared. A number of reports were written by me and shared either with the Managing Director or with the team as a whole as well as the numerous ongoing interpretations and suggestions for intervention that I made in the 18-month period. The various documents used by the team, and the formal minutes of meetings kept by the Managing Director's personal assistant at every senior team meeting also provide data against which my own observational notes and theoretical notes could be compared. The recording of observational notes and elaboration of theoretical notes is part of the systems psychodynamic approach to data collection in organizational settings. The need to track data at the descriptive level – including the emotional responses and thoughts of the clinical fieldworker – is central to a discipline of a sustained monitoring of one's own subjectivity in order to discern what is of epistemological value in that context. At a more material level, the various sources of data are shown in tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2: Quantitative and Descriptive Details of Research Data (Feb 2008 – Dec 2009)

<i>Sources of data</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Description</i>
Minutes of meetings with Programme Management Group	57	3-4 pages written by me (except for 9 occasions) and approved by other team members
Observational notes from Programme Management Group	48	Observational notes written during the meetings (I did not attend all meetings)
Monthly Theoretical Notes from Programme Management Group	12	1-2 page Theoretical Notes which attempted to synthesize data from a number of sources
Observational / short theoretical notes from all day senior team meetings	10	15-30 pages of observational notes taken during meetings and written up within 24 hours + 1-2 pages of theoretical notes
Observational notes from off-site meetings	2	10-12 pages of observational notes written up within 24 hours
Meetings with the Managing Director	15	2-3 pages of written notes taken during the meetings
Meetings with the Marketing Director	3	As above
Meetings with Human Resources Director	15	As above
Meetings with Chief Financial Officer	8	As above
Meetings with Executive Director Oil and Gas	6	As above
Meeting with Executive Director Legal Services	7	As above
Meetings with Executive Director Technology	3	As above
Meetings with Executive Director Accounting and Finance	2	As above

Other useful sources of data are the 12 ‘Monthly Briefings’ that were written by the Programme Management Group and approved by the whole senior team. Every

month these communication briefings were ‘cascaded’ down the management line in a structured way. They represent what the senior team wanted to communicate about the manifold initiatives that it was working on.

Table 3: Company documents used as sources of data

<i>Document</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Description</i>
Monthly Brief	12	Written and approved by senior team as monthly communications ‘cascade’
Official meeting minutes of senior team meetings	13	8-12 pages written by MD’s Personal Assistant
Emails	8	Informal communications between MD and myself or all team members
Communications Presentation (2006)	1	Analysis of company performance
Financial reports	8	Used at senior team meetings to report company performance

Comparisons between the formal way the team presented itself through the monthly briefing documents and their ‘behind the scenes’ discussions in the Programme Management Group and senior team meetings provide useful contrasting accounts.

Approach to Data Analysis based on clinical fieldwork from the systems psychodynamic approach

Having outlined the site selection process, described the organization in some detail (a more comprehensive description can be found as an appendix) and described and enumerated my sources of data, I will now present my approach to data analysis.

Data analysis within clinical fieldwork of this kind in which important data are derived from responses to interventions from the clinician in the role of consultant cannot progress through a linear process of data collection and then data analysis. Much of my sense-making and ongoing interpretations as well as the reactions to them thus become folded into the emerging data – data collection and analysis are tightly coupled.

Thus many interventions are included within the formal minutes of the Programme Management Group, since my own name appears in many of the minutes, and refer to my own inferences as we worked. The responses to my work are often implicit from the text. When my interventions were less well received these were often not referred to and were instead recorded in my later observational notes written up immediately following each meeting as well as in weekly analytical notes. Examples from the first strand – Strategic Projects – presented in chapter 5, include the interpretation that the Executive Directors were scapegoating one of the line managers responsible for ‘internal recruitment’ and that they were doing so in order to avoid competition amongst themselves.

Such interpretations were resisted and attacked at times although eventually validated first in individual 'off line' comments and finally in the senior team setting. However, this is not always the case. The longitudinal nature of the research allows for data to be understood differently after a few months when the team reflects differently on its previous activities.

In order to provide a closer coupling between data collection and analysis, from description through to explanatory theory, I set out to firstly record data in Programme Management Group meetings that would provide rich descriptions of what was said and what I experienced in the meetings. When I began the data analysis, I re-read all the minutes and observational notes from the Programme Management Group. Since I was required to provide an account of the *whole* meeting not simply aspects of the meeting that may have struck me as salient, given my research questions, I was left with a holistic account of each meeting which meant that the final set of data was still highly contextualized. In this way it provided a fertile field for data analysis. Accounts of many issues that are not part of the final strands identified, nevertheless remained part of the data analysis process and usefully forced me to maintain perspective. The writing of the minutes slowed down the selection of data by me in the moment and thus reduced the likelihood of a tendency to pay more attention to some issues than to others.

Data Synthesis

Each combination of observational notes and formal minutes for each meeting was reduced to a half a page and placed in a separate document. This 'PMG summary

synthesis' document is 33 pages long, representing the synthesis of 250 pages of minutes and observational notes from the Programme Management Group meetings from June 2008 to October 2009 – some 57 meetings. Each half page consisted of the meeting agenda, a brief summary of both content and process. These short paragraphs summarize the content as described in the much longer and detailed formal minutes but also add process comments from my experiences, as written up in my observational notes during and after the meetings. The list of agenda items is a useful point of reference for the scope of issues taken up by the Programme Management Group while the summary paragraphs attempt to convey the focus of the meeting – some agenda items would take up almost the whole time while others would take up only a few minutes. The following example shows an extract from the four pages of approved minutes of 13th October 2008. These formal minutes are written up from notes taken in the meeting typed straight onto my computer and summarize many of the actual words used by the team members. Within agenda item 2, some of my own interventions and the response to them are included.

Programme Management Group Meeting Monday 13 th October 2008 0830 – 1000 Attendees: Managing Director, Marketing Director, Declan Fitzsimons (DF) Apologies: Executive Director Technology
<u>Agenda</u> 1. Glossary of terms, conceptual architecture 2. Projects Update 3. Gantt Chart update

2. Projects Update

Future Manager project

The Managing Director explained that in his view the project team is making good progress on 'role' and 'expectations' in keeping with the original Project Brief. They are focussing only on front line managers at the moment.

He has offered them a consultation, that they should come back to the senior team in the near future for guidance and consultation. He also asked them to prepare a brief written document of the current status of their work.

He also suggested that this project group will probably be ready for implementation of some kind in the New Year.

How should the projects relate to the senior team?

The Marketing Director shared his impression that some of the projects might be running off and doing their own thing and may lack direction. A discussion ensued about why this impression might be conveyed. The Managing Director noted that within the senior team there seems to be little engagement with the projects. Why might this be the case?

The discussion broadened to include a malaise around the way the senior team agenda is put together. Rather than this being a project specific issue it seems to be related to issues related to the way the senior team works.

DF commented that the concern the Marketing Director expresses about timing of project related activities within the context of the broader communication of change reflects the ongoing split with the projects appearing to be some activities unrelated to the broader strategic change initiative. DF proposed that it may be time to revisit the whole structure of change initiatives including the projects so they can all be integrated into one set of related activities. This may require changing the name of these activities.

3. Gantt Chart Update

Going through the Strategic Project line items there were some questions about the Your Career project.

It was commented by the Marketing Director that there is a danger that the projects see themselves as discrete. The example was given of how the Compliance project team were not aware of how the minimum standards implementation might relate to a broader initiative within the organisation to approach clients and candidates in a different way.

The full minutes from which this extract is taken are then read and approved by the team members. The four page minutes of this meeting were later summarized and 'reduced' by me in the 33-page Programme Management Group synthesis document an extract from which, from a synthesis of this meeting, is shown below. This document includes not only the formal minutes but my observational notes made immediately following each meeting.

PMG Synthesis document

13 October 2008

Agenda

1. Glossary of terms, conceptual architecture
2. Projects Update
3. Gantt Chart update

Process and content summary

Quite a lot of debate in this meeting about how to ensure that the managers do keep to the main body of the Briefing and don't avoid parts that aren't clear. The Managing Director expresses interest in knowing how people are experiencing the briefing. There was a positive upbeat atmosphere when discussing the roll out of the Briefings.

It was at this meeting that the Marketing Director suggests that the projects are running off and doing their own thing. I could feel my own frustration rising. I struggle to be very calm and objective in the meeting even though I feel and am seen as representing the projects. I suggest at this meeting revamping the whole strategic work to integrate the projects. I said I would propose how to do this. The Managing Director took up the theme of senior team engagement with the projects and for the first time a link was made to the way the senior team works. The others then take this up with apparent conviction that then dissipates once we discuss what might be done to address this issue of senior team engagement.

The 33-page Programme Management Group synthesis document included summaries of each month – July 2008, August 2008, etc. The strands emerged from this process of summarizing and synthesizing these meeting minutes and observational notes, as well as an iterative exploration of relevant data associated with the Programme Management Group's work from the senior team meetings, my own observational notes as well as the official minutes of the senior team meetings, one-to-one meetings, off-site meetings, monthly briefing documents, and team presentations. Once I had produced the 33-page synthesis document during which I had begun to consolidate my sense of where the team was most preoccupied in terms of energy and affect, and in relation to which tasks, I created the first version of a what I was later to describe as strands. I placed all the

references to a particular topic – such as the strategic projects, into one file, returning to the original Programme Management Group minutes and now using the ‘copy and paste’ function on the computer to place all references to the emergent themes – such as strategic projects and strategic priorities into separate files. From here further exploration of data from other sources was explored for relevance.

The data from the Programme Management Group is particularly rich for three reasons: firstly because of the opportunity for data collection – typing directly onto a computer during the meeting as well as being an active participant; secondly because the task of the group was specifically to assess progress against the adaptive work of the senior team on the ‘shared accountability’ tasks listed on the Gantt chart; and thirdly because the existence of the Programme Management Group itself represented an example of an attempt at shared leadership – it was itself an example of adaptive work. Much of the work of the senior team in contrast was also taken up with operational discussions and in itself constitutes data for a group dynamic designed to avoid adaptive work; during the final phase of the team’s work, the functioning of the senior team became a topic of discussion to the extent that I identified it as one of eight strands. I will now outline what I mean by ‘strands’

The ‘Strands’ of data identified

What is a strand? A strand corresponds to a theme of senior teamwork related to a pattern of systemic affect; the word strand is used because they are not discrete from one another but weave in and out of what is the ongoing and evolving scope of work. That these strands correspond to actual streams of work is a reflection of the highly contextualized nature of system psychodynamic interpretive work.

From this perspective we are always considering the psychodynamics of a system in relation to a task or set of tasks. These strands are therefore related both to the actual activities of the team and are associated with the kind of systemic affect to which Heifetz refers in his model of adaptive leadership. Affect need not refer to strong emotional expression. A group may be quite ‘flat’ and yet this may feel significant as events unfold. These strands in being so close to the data represent the first step in data analysis that is firmly embedded within the processes and structures that the team created to conduct its adaptive work. Not only is this a reflection of the nature of system psychodynamics but also represents good research practice.

It is important to note that while we may find patterns of affect related to a particular task, these dynamics will tell us something about the system as a whole and can thus be generalized to other aspects of the team’s work. What all of these strands have in common is that they represent an attempt at adaptive learning rather than the execution of routine operational tasks.

The content themes of these strands – such as Strategic Projects, Strategic Priorities and Career Paths – were *consistently* associated with patterns of affect over a period of several months; this includes periods in which the team felt it was working well, as well as periods when this was less the case. The ultimate failure of the team, however, is reflected in the pervasiveness of frustration and more negative patterns of affect rather than a positive sense of the team's agency in the face of its adaptive challenges. Systemic affect does not refer simply to my own experience of these meetings but is based on accounts from team members themselves of their own experience of these attempts to share leadership – the strands relate to language used by group members and terms which continually appear on internal documents. Sometimes it is the contrast in the experience of the team and my own that constitutes important data. The team may for example, be quite high and excited while I feel deflated and alienated.

All of these strands are related to the shared accountability tasks that the team had agreed were the responsibility of the team as a whole – they were all regular items on the agenda of the Programme Management Group or the senior team meetings. I will also refer to them as 'shared leadership tasks' as a non-controversial variant of language they were using themselves. The strands relate to the team's collective work on the shared accountability items on the Gantt chart, a simplified version of which is shown below (Table 4). The number of items on the chart varied from month to month, as new items were added or older items consolidated as the team made adjustments. This particular version of the chart shows the status of these items as of July 2009 at which point the team's frustration with its own functioning

was high because 14 of the 15 items were categorised as 'delayed' which meant that, despite the intention to implement, they were often based on decisions which were thought to have been made.

Table 4: The Programme Management Group: The Gantt Chart July 2009

Shared Accountability Task	Notes	Aug 09	Sept 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09	Status
1. Company Strategy	Update strategic triangle/ review bottom of triangle						delayed
2. Specialisms strategy	Complete and approve by Q2						complete
3. Temp Commission Scheme	Review and complete by Q2						delayed
4. Managers' Bonus Plan	Amend and complete by end of Q2						delayed
5. Customer First	Allocate 30 top clients for each team to business models						delayed
6. Perm Project							delayed
7. New Talent Project							delayed
8. Compliance Project	Agree minimum expectations / Quality candidates						delayed
9. Future Manager Project	Implementation of managers' role						delayed
10. Culture /Values							delayed
11. Process Engineering							delayed
12. Candidate Screening							delayed
13. Technology							delayed
14. Training new consultants							delayed

The strands do not correspond to items on the Gantt chart but are instead related to the team's work on these items. In my first attempt at identifying these strands of systemic affect related to work on the shared accountability tasks, I developed a list of eight of them. These are shown below in table 5.

There is no suggestion that the strands shown in the table *caused* the patterns of systemic affect associated with them. What is suggested, however, is that in working on these tasks significant group dynamics emerged and did so consistently over time. A pattern of affect may emerge which is functional and may help a team face and work through the adaptive challenge faced. A pattern of systemic affect – an unconscious group dynamic such as basic assumption 'fight-flight' or 'dependency' may alternatively be dysfunctional to the extent that while it helps to contain the anxiety engendered by the adaptive work it does so by distorting reality in some way – such as patterns of scapegoating involving senior team members, myself and other managers from the level below the senior team. There were periods when the team felt as if it were working well on its tasks. Often these perceptions changed over time such that what appeared to be functional at one point turns out differently several months later, thus requiring a different retrospective view of the earlier teamwork. Because of the team's challenges around adaptive learning there were few glimpses of situations in which what started out poorly turned toward the more positive.

These eight strands therefore represent a first round of coding that identifies data themes related to my two operationalized research questions. From the system

psychodynamic perspective, such affective dynamics are *always* related to context and to the tasks that organizational members are facing. To thus identify patterns of systemic affect unrelated to the tasks performed by organizational actors would run counter to the assumptions on which a system psychodynamic perspective rests.

Table 5: First Coding of data into ‘strands’

<i>Strand title</i>	<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Description</i>
1. Strategic Projects	March 2008 – October 2009	The relationship between the senior team and the 5 strategic projects
2. Strategic Priorities	December 2008 – October 2009	The process of agreeing and implementing the 2009 priorities.
3. Architecture to four columns	September 2008 – May 2009	The creation of a document integrating the what, why and how of the company’s strategy and vision
4. Business Models	March 2008 – October 2009	Implementing four discrete business models to address different client groups
5. Career Paths	March 2008 – May 2009	The attempt to address issues of retention of staff using Career Paths
6. Senior team decision-making	March 2009 – October 2009	During 2009 the senior team self-perceived issue with its own effectiveness
7. Programme Management Group	June 2008 – October 2009	The experience of Programme Management Group members in relation to the senior team
8. The Communications Cascade	September 2008 – June 2009	The work with an external consultancy to create a ‘story’ and Monthly Briefings communication for all employees.

The development of these eight strands has not been a serial process but an iterative one. In addition, although derived from data collected from February 2008 to December 2009, the origins of these strands owe their origins to earlier work with the organization. These earlier accounts are included to ensure coherence – providing a necessary background setting for the later, more systematic, data collection.

This chapter provides a description of the first stage of my data collection and analysis. Subsequent chapters will provide a detailed account of further levels of data analysis from description, explanatory to interpretive levels, and a comprehensive account of the contribution this study makes. The next chapter presents four strands developed from a further synthesis of these eight. For example the strand entitled ‘the Programme Management Group’ becomes integrated into elements of the ‘career paths’ and ‘senior team decision-making’ – the ‘Communications cascade strand’. However, for the most part the selection of four strands from eight is because these four taken together provide sufficient coverage of the dynamics of the team in this period. The four strands – ‘strategic projects’, ‘strategic priorities’, ‘career paths’ and ‘senior-team decision-making’ – are representative rather than exclusive, providing a comprehensive overview of the group dynamics of the team and the perceptions of senior team members of their experience as they undertook work on their shared leadership or shared accountability tasks.

Chapter 5

DESCRIPTIVE AND EXPLANATORY DATA

ANALYSIS

Descriptive and explanatory data analysis

Introduction

Having outlined the research methodology, design and methods, including the data synthesis process, this chapter presents descriptive data collected to address the gap in the literature identified by my review – namely a rich description of the fine-grained dynamics of a team as they try to implement shared leadership in response to adaptive challenges. The main research question that this study focusses on is:

How can the study of an attempt to implement shared leadership in an executive team, using a systems psychodynamic perspective, contribute to our understanding of leadership responses to adaptive challenges?

This question is operationalized into the following two questions:

RQ1. How does an attempt to implement shared leadership affect the group dynamics within a senior team?

RQ2. How do team members relate these experiences to their perception of the tasks that the senior team is charged with achieving?

Question 1 refers to ‘group dynamics’ – a systems psychodynamic concept – and question 2 refers to group members’ reflections on their own experience of working on a set of shared leadership tasks that sometimes take several months to achieve. To address both question requires that the data to be collected have the six characteristics identified at the end of chapter three and summarized here:

Data should relate to:

- (i) *The actual processes of the senior team at work*
- (ii) *The experience of the clinical fieldworker in role*
- (iii) *The tasks the group sets itself and for which it holds itself accountable*
- (iv) *Team member reactions to interpretations, recommendations and interventions from the consultant*
- (v) *Patterns of behaviour and related affect*
- (vi) *Data over time – a longitudinal study:*

This kind of data consists of descriptions of the experience of group affect, manifesting consistently in the context of their shared accountability or shared leadership tasks. This inevitably involves relatively long periods covering several months as the underlying dynamics emerge. The result is the identification of a descriptive level of data grouped in ‘strands’ that have titles which reflect strongly the language used by the senior team and around which the group dynamics are identified. I use the word ‘strand’ because of the way a consistent pattern of affect weaves around the emerging set of tasks and is in fact also constitutive of that emergence.

Each strand is made up of around a dozen key data points which describe a range of experiences including manifest group behaviour, my own feelings and team members' individual and collective reflections on their own experience as they work on their shared leadership tasks. The number of strands presented – four in total – provides comprehensive coverage of the senior team's work on shared leadership tasks to the point of saturation. The four strands presented do not simply represent a choice from the eight identified in the first round of data coding but, as described in the previous chapter, are the result of a process of further synthesis in which some could be reduced and these four provide sufficient coverage of the team dynamics. To include further strands would not add substantially to the interpretive level data analysis in the next chapter. The data presented in these four strands are sufficient to address the two research questions. The strands are not therefore exclusive but representative; they are not discrete but inter-connected. The coding or grouping of these data is closely related to the tasks, as would be expected within the discipline of clinical fieldwork in the systems psychodynamic tradition. At the end of each strand I outline some explanatory analysis from the systems psychodynamic conceptual framework to which I associated in identifying these strands. The subtitles – 'group dynamics of leading together' and 'team member perceptions of their collective work' – address both research questions. However, the main exposition of how these data link to systems psychodynamic theory is reserved for the next chapter in which interpretive level data are presented.

The tasks addressed in these strands reflect the Managing Director's attempt to share leadership. This sharing of leadership takes the form of identifying for the first time a set of tasks that require collective agreement and collective implementation. Instead of individual Executive Directors deciding customer or Permanent Recruitment strategies alone they are asked to work with other Executive Directors and functional heads of HR, Finance and Marketing to design and implement initiatives that are consistent across the organization. Such work is adaptive in nature and in most cases powerful systemic affect can be mobilized. Until now there have been no studies of this kind within the shared leadership field.

These strands are presented using data from all five phases of my work (table 6) Data from phases 1 and 2 are used to provide contextual background data – this appears under the heading 'background' for each strand. Phases 3 to 5 represent more systematic data collection for this study and are presented under the headings 'the beginning', 'the middle' and 'the end' for each strand.

Table 6: Phases of work with senior team July 2006 - December 2010

July 2006 (1)	Nov 2006 – June 2007 (2)	July 2007 – Jan 2008 (3)	Feb 2008 – Oct 2008 (4)	Nov 2008 – Dec 2009 (5)
First meeting to facilitate first Away Day	Facilitate senior team meetings and strategic formulations	No longer work directly with the senior team but closely with the projects	Creation of Programme Management Group and reintegration with the senior team work	Spend one year focussing on the functioning of the senior team and its implementation of company strategy

Each strand begins with a summary followed by a description of the data divided into a narrative with a beginning, middle and end. Data from formal documents such as Programme Management Group meetings, Project Briefs, or Monthly Briefings are shown in boxes for ease of presentation.

What data is included and what is left out?

The Programme Management Group created a Gantt chart on which all the tasks for which the team had 'shared accountability' – this was the term used – were recorded. These tasks represent the content around which the Managing Director attempted to share leadership. By June 2009 it was clear that 14 out of 15 of these tasks were 'delayed' – a source of great frustration for team members and the Managing Director. The first of these four strands refers to all the strategic projects – five out of the 15 tasks recorded on the Gantt chart; the second strand focusses on one particular strategic project; the third strand refers to the attempt to prioritize these 15 tasks and the final strand covers the various attempts the team made to assess its own decision-making in relation to these 15 tasks. The presented data are therefore a balance of specific and more meta-level data in terms of the team's overall work.

The other tasks on the Gantt chart include 'temp commission scheme', 'Managers' Bonus Plan', 'Recco Strategy', 'Customer First', 'Business Models', 'Specialisms strategy', 'Compliance project', 'Future Manager project', and 'Perm Strategy'.

While none of these is referred to directly in the data, they are indirectly included in at least half of what is presented here. Some tasks are not selected because of

limited access; however, there are no tasks that represent areas where the team worked differently in terms of shared leadership – this is clear from both Programme Management Group and senior team meetings.

Table 7: Time lines of the four data strands

	1. Strategic Projects	2. Career Paths	3. Strategic Priorities	4. Senior team decision-
2008				
March	Beginning	Beginning		
April				
May				
June				
July				
August				
September	Middle	Middle		
October				
November				
December			Beginning	
2009				
January				
February			Middle	
March	End	End	End	Beginning
April				
May				
June				Middle
July				End
August				
September				
October				

Strand 1: Strategic Projects

March 2008 – October 2009 (18 months)

Summary

By March 2008 the senior team had committed to five 'strategic projects' that demanded a considerable amount of their own time and the time of their first reports – 23 in all excluding senior team members. These projects all addressed what were considered to be adaptive challenges for the organization as a whole. Project meetings were weekly and usually of 2-3 hours in length. Within a month the senior team embarked on a second strategic stream of work with similar implications in terms of senior management time. Both these strategic streams of work generated a large number of initiatives that came to be managed by the Programme Management Group as tasks for which there was 'shared accountability' – they are therefore shared leadership tasks. The tension between the projects and the other strategic work increased with conflict between project sponsors and the team as a whole, as evidenced by the vitriolic comments in private meetings directed at other project sponsors, open conflict between project teams and the senior team during meetings, and numerous comments from senior team members during Programme Management Group and senior team meetings. The projects become the focus of senior management criticism throughout 2008 and 2009.

Background (before March 2008)

Having formed the senior team in July 2006, a two-day senior team workshop was arranged for September 2006 at which five strategic projects were identified. Each represented a challenge deemed to affect the organization as a whole and not subject to technical solution – adaptive challenges. I consulted to the process of project set-up and launch. The project names, focus and project sponsors are shown below.

Table 8: The Strategic Projects and their sponsors

STRATEGIC PROJECT	ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE	SPONSOR
Future Manager	How to get managers to take responsibility and be more accountable	Managing Director
New Talent	How to attract a superior talent pipeline of recruitment consultants	Executive Director Oil and Gas
Compliance	How to get consultants to manage candidates more effectively	Chief Financial Officer
Perm	How to create a common approach to Permanent Recruitment	Executive Director Legal Services
Your Career	How to retain more high performing managers	Director of Human Resources

Each project has 4-5 members assigned from the next level of management.

The new Marketing Director joined the company in January 2007 and had not been present at the workshop where these projects were identified. Throughout 2007 to mid-2008, the senior team worked on these topics in the senior team meetings. I attended these meetings occasionally on project related matters. These projects came to be listed on a spreadsheet document referred to as 'the Gantt chart' used later by the Programme Management Group (formed in mid 2008) to monitor progress against tasks for which the phrase 'shared accountability' was used.

- Project Briefs written and approved by senior team but not referred to again

Each sponsor prepared a Project Brief that was then submitted to the senior team for approval. An excerpt from the Your Career Project Brief document is shown below:

Project Brief
Project Background
This project is called 'Your Career'. The senior team is keen to ensure employee turnover is contained to an acceptable level, our most talented employees are encouraged to stay and grow their career with us and average tenure is improved.
Baseline Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Retention of good performers (monitor top 100 consultants)- Overall employee turnover from 49% to below 40%- Average tenure to be over 3 years – currently 2.6 years- Trends of growth in fee earners in each category- Success of Career Plans for each individual

All five Project Briefs, a document of 3-4 pages, were approved in March 2007. They were rarely, if ever, referred to again. At the same time the senior team had embarked on a separate strategic review process led by the new Marketing Director. I was not invited to participate in this process. This process involved the team going through a number of questions related to a 'strategic triangle' that covered a range of themes including 'business line strategy', 'competitive strategy', 'service strategy' and 'pricing strategy'. The senior team members were thus engaged in two separate streams of work with obvious implications for one another. The work was, however, kept separate.

- The senior team engages in two separate streams of strategic work

It became clear in late 2007 that there was a tension between the work on the five strategic projects and this strategic work led by the Marketing Director. This was confirmed in a private meeting with the Managing Director in October 2007:

'Faruk [Marketing Director] feels the projects are too internally focussed...but, if we get these internal things right we'll be serving the customer better anyway so the projects are essential.'

The projects thus received support from the Managing Director but the work of the senior team and the projects was still kept separate – separate meetings, and separate documentation. Tension increased between them. While I was not present in the work on the strategic triangle informally I was told that the work

was progressing well. A key outcome of this strategic work was the formulation of four separate business models. 'Business models' became a regular item on the monthly team agendas and later recorded on the Gantt chart as one of the shared accountability tasks.

THE BEGINNING (March – June 2008)

- Tension between project sponsor and Marketing Director

The beginning of this strand of data relates to a high level of affect between some project sponsors. There was also tension between the senior team as a whole and particular projects.

In early 2008 there was a lot of project activity. The Programme Management Group from which much of my data comes had not yet been created. The Executive Director Oil and Gas was the sponsor of the strategic project called New Talent. This project focussed on the internal processes by which potential new staff members – recruitment consultants – were recruited and allocated to one of the three lines of business. Each of the Executive Directors was constantly struggling to retain good staff. The retention issue was perceived to strongly affect sales performance and thus Executive Directors' bonuses. Sales figures were presented at each senior team meeting.

The Marketing Director expressed concerns at senior team meetings, that the focus on internal processes such as the recruitment of recruitment consultants was to put the 'cart before the horse':

'If we don't know what markets we are in, then how do we know who to recruit? We might create a great process for recruiting the wrong people.'

As part of the project team's data collection – interviewing 20 managers across the business to explore the current effectiveness of that process, one member of the New Talent team interviewed the Marketing Director. At one New Talent project team meeting I attended in March 2008 considerable anger was being registered against the Marketing Director for his perceived criticism of the project team. A project team member who had interviewed him said:

'To be fair to Faruk [the Marketing Director] I think he was trying to be helpful but I was not well pleased when he said at the end that he felt we were off beam as a project team. The implication was that we didn't know what we were doing and shouldn't be wasting company time.'

In a one-to-one meeting after the New Talent project meeting the project sponsor, the Executive Director Oil and Gas, expressed her feelings more directly. In response to my comment that the meeting had gone well and the team seemed to feel confident they could achieve something she responded:

'Well not if bloody Faruk [Marketing Director] has anything to do with it..what is it? He seems out to get the project. He doesn't do feelings..you heard him.'

This tension between the New Talent project sponsor, her project team and the Marketing Director was to come to a head during meetings in March 2008 at which the project team presented its findings to the senior team.

- Tension between New Talent and Your Career project sponsors

Meanwhile there was also tension between project sponsors – the Executive Director Oil and Gas and the HR Director. The latter was the project sponsor for the Your Career project. This project focussed on the retention issue amongst managers. The business was losing experienced managers at an unacceptable rate and this was considered an intractable problem. In addition to the content level of overlap with the New Talent project, the HR Director was in charge of a small department called ‘internal recruitment’. This was firmly within the remit of the New Talent project – project team members had interviewed members of internal recruitment.

During March-April 2008, I had several project related meetings with the HR Director. These meetings were sometimes 90 minutes long during which he was vociferous in his judgment of the Executive Director Oil and Gas and her New Talent project team, about colleagues within the senior team and the Managing Director.

*‘what a waste of bloody time..they just don’t know what they are doing...what’s it got to do with them! What do they know about...so they go piddling about with their.. a few interviews..they’re f*****g clueless! I’d love to put any of them on the phones..they listen to the managers shouting down the phone at them...it’s a favourite pastime to ring up internal recruitment and have a good moan. And now we’ve got Graham [Managing Director] talking about..whether competency based interviewing works..Nelson [Executive Director Technology] asking whether there might be a better*

way or Graham suggesting that maybe we've got the criteria wrong..so fine change it..change the competencies but you know and I know that they basically know nothing...they're all experts about nothing!'

Since my role was to consult to the projects, there were times when I had to try and balance the HR Director's strong criticism with an alternative view. At times this was so hard that I felt as if I was in the room alone as Konrad became so excited and angry. I later wrote:

'I'm not sure I can consult to Konrad [the HR Director]. I've never seen him so angry. He ranted for an hour. A lot of the data the New Talent team are collecting actually supports him, but he just can't hear it.'

- Conflict develops between senior team and projects

The tension came to a head in mid-March 2008. The New Talent project team interviewed 20 managers, some candidate consultants and the team members of internal recruitment as well as the manager. The data were coded by team members and presented to the senior team. Codes included, 'competition between sectors', 'clarity of role of Internal Recruitment', and 'clarity of process'. When presented to the senior team on 18 March 2008 the data were considered explosive.

Before the meeting the New Talent project sponsor, the Executive Director Oil and Gas, had warned the project team that her colleagues in the senior team would find the data challenging.

'You must send the data beforehand to give them a chance to digest it. There's some pretty contentious stuff in here!'

The following two quotes illustrate the contentious nature of the data:

'Manchester is a nightmare: lots of rivalry between Oil and Gas and Technology and Industry teams: Now, if I have a CV for Manchester, I will send it to both Associate Directors to avoid disagreement – this is a lot easier and avoids me being in the firing line.'

'I am always fighting others internally for candidates.'

- Data presented illustrates competition between Executive Directors

The meeting where these data were presented – on the 18 March 2008 – was very tense. In the room were all the senior team members and the five project team members. While divided into three sub-groups to assess the impact of the data The Executive Director Technology suggested to the HR Director that he fire the manager of Internal Recruitment:

'I think it does come down to the competence of the individual manager. I've expressed my feelings on several occasions...., you should just get rid of her! Just get rid of her!'

During the debate that followed the senior team and project team got into some heated challenges. I wrote in my observational notes:

'The project group are really getting challenged. Mara [The Executive Director Oil and Gas and project sponsor] is managing her role well – project sponsor and senior team member'.

It later became clear that the Executive Directors, members of the senior team, were 'cherry picking' CVs for themselves. They would approach members of the internal recruitment team and ask to be shown the best CVs so that they could direct them to their own area.

I spent a number of hours engaged in telephone calls with the manager of internal recruitment convincing her that the senior team were willing to take a balanced view. She told me stories of being called into impromptu early morning meetings by senior team members for a 'dressing down'. The HR Director, her line manager, was not informed that such meetings took place.

THE MIDDLE (June 2008 – December 2008)

The 'middle' of this strand refers to the patterns of affect that began to emerge and remain consistent over a period of several months at the beginning of the work of the Programme Management Group. The first meeting of this group had only agenda items related to the strategic projects and the tone was exclusively negative. At the same time the Marketing Director was bringing in a consulting firm that specialized in communications. The limited discretionary time of senior managers to work on non revenue generating activities was a hotly contested issue leading to conflict between the emerging Marketing led initiative around communications and the existing strategic projects. The focus on communications-based interventions later in 2008 led to the projects hardly appearing on the agenda of this group.

Following a controversial presentation of mine on 22 April 2008 to the senior team at which I presented data and a hypothesis that the two streams of work – projects and the strategic 'triangle' work of the senior team – were 'split', with the projects being consistently perceived negatively and the 'strategic' work being seen as positive. The Managing Director wrote an email to me the following day

expressing his disapproval for the way I had conducted the meeting. The letter ended with:

'Secondly, I think that the focus on Faruk [the Marketing Director] as a potential derail of the process was unfair. If you had mentioned your intention to me beforehand I would have suggested another way of bringing the issue to the surface. I actually don't think it is as big an issue as you make out. Faruk realises he is not particularly strong at emotional engagement but understands the need to get it right. It is beginning to feel like you are scapegoating Faruk which is unfair and not helpful.'

In a theoretical note I wrote to myself on 23 April 2008 – the next day – I wrote:

'I feel as if I have been in the wars with so much of the aggression toward the projects being expressed indirectly to me but with an avoidance of any discussion of these issues in the senior team. I feel embarrassment at my strong challenge yesterday but I was so frustrated. I came in at one point to the senior team and they were laughing and joking and eating chocolate in the afternoon and I could feel the atmosphere change with my presence. I feel I have lost my role as consultant to the senior team's commitment to adaptive project work and become instead simply their project manager. The difference is subtle but my experience in role makes sense when I frame my role as 'project manager' – the aggression toward the projects is also aggression toward me. This is what Miller referred to as the 'emergent role'. I guess

it serves the purpose of distancing themselves from their roles as project sponsors – I am not supporting them in managing their projects but am seen as the project manager of all their projects.'

As a result of my follow up conversation with the Managing Director, the Programme Management Group was formed in June 2008. The 'middle' of this strand describes a process in which the five projects, along with all other initiatives – including those related to the 'strategic triangle' – come under the purview of this small group that met every Monday morning. These are recorded on the Gantt chart as shared accountability tasks.

- Projects are the only agenda item for the Programme Management Group meetings

I was unable to attend the second meeting of the Programme Management Group. The short minutes of this meeting are shown below. The only item on the agenda was the strategic projects at a time when most senior team meetings had as many as 15 items on the agenda. Before this meeting I received a phone call from the Managing Director after which I felt that I was being asked to what extent I concurred with the consensus that the projects were not delivering. I felt under pressure to agree and felt afterwards that I had not stood up for what I believed. The following section from the minutes of the Programme Management Group meeting in June 2008 illustrates the tone:

Programme Management Group Meeting

16 June 2008

We share concerns about the projects based on pace, content and a lack of direction.

We fear that the arms length relationship between the senior team and projects has hampered progress. Have we got the role of the sponsor right in managing this interaction?

We need to consider if we have given the project groups the appropriate 'tools' to get the job done in reasonable timescales?

Have we clarified sufficiently what 'getting the job done' means for the project groups? (i.e. it is not making a recommendation of a course of action to the senior team, it is seeing it through to implementation)

These formal minutes belie the degree of antipathy to the projects experienced in informal and formal settings. They are also the first official formulation of what becomes an often repeated diagnostic around the projects – they are consistently referred to as producing no results, being slow, and out of control. This period also coincided with the introduction of another external consultancy, Synthesis, brought in to support the senior team in creating a 'story' line about the strategic vision that could be communicated to the management population.

By October 2008, the 'story' managed by Synthesis had created a positive atmosphere in the senior team as shown in the minutes and it was generally

considered to be a success. On 13 October 2008 the projects reappear on the agenda. The following was recorded in my observational notes:

'I'm not saying all but..I think it's clear that some of the projects are running off and doing their own thing' (Marketing Director)

'Why do we think that might be happening?' (Managing Director)

'But look at the way we put the senior team meeting agenda together..it's packed'
(Executive Director Technology)

'The business models are slow, it's not just the projects..' (Managing Director)

'Maybe the experience of the projects not delivering fast enough tells you something about how the senior team is functioning..' (DF)

And then in the formal minutes written up by me later:

Programme Management Group Meeting

13 October 2008

Faruk [the Marketing Director] shared his impression that some of the projects might be running off and doing their own thing and may lack direction. A discussion ensued about why this impression might be conveyed. The Managing Director noted that in the senior team meetings there seems to be little engagement with the projects. Why might this be the case?

THE END (December 2008 – October 2009)

- **New Executive Director is co-opted – she assumes ‘slow projects’ language**
- **Projects are described as ‘tail wagging the dog’**

Two months later, in December 2008, at the senior team meeting, attended by the Executive Director of Accounting and Finance, a newly hired ‘big hitter’ from a main competitor, the issue of projects was raised. The Programme Management group had two agenda items to discuss with the senior team members. One item was the relatively innocuous subject of Director visibility around the organization and the second was the strategic projects. The Executive Director Technology proposed that the senior team split into two groups. In one group, the Managing Director, the Finance Director, the Executive Director Oil and Gas and the HR Director (all sponsors of strategic projects) were to discuss the issue of Director visibility while all other team members including the new Executive Director and

the Marketing, debated the projects. The Executive Director of Accounting and Finance, new to the company, was curious about why the senior team did not take a 'firmer hand' with the projects.

'Why don't you just call the projects in every four weeks, you know..it's not rocket science..' (Executive Director of Accounting and Finance)

'Well, we've suggested that kind of thing..but we really don't know what's going on...why? Because they decide whether they tell us.' (Marketing Director)

'There's a perception anyway, that the projects are out of control..or at least that we don't know what they are doing.' (Executive Director Technology).

'The Gantt chart keeps changing because we allow the project groups to make changes...it's about setting the agenda for them. Instead what we have is a case of the tail wagging the dog!' (Marketing Director)

At the end of the report outs from each group, I asked the Executive Director Technology – a member of the Programme Management Group – how he had selected the groups? The silence that followed was tense. My question was so controversial that two months later when negotiating my role with the senior team, both the Managing Director and the Executive Director Technology commented that they value my input but do not want me to go 'off-piste' and take the group off on a tangent and that I should not ask questions like the one I had asked at the senior team meeting.

At a meeting of the Programme Management Group on 9 January 2009 the following discussion took place as part of a debriefing of the December senior team meeting.

'How did that format work?' (Executive Director Technology)

'I think it worked...' (Marketing Director)

'We at least let them know the kinds of issues we've been working on at Programme Management Group' (Executive Director Technology)

'I think we all came to the same conclusion, that the projects are calling the shots..'
(Marketing Director)

'Yes, Linda had some thoughts about that too..good to get her view..' (Executive Director Technology)

'How shall we do this? If everyone agreed that the 90 days and client work should be a strategic project..then there might be a lot of priorities'. (Managing Director)

'Have the projects outlived their usefulness?' (Marketing Director)

- Repetition of the same diagnostic about the strategic project

'Got to be careful here. The world is very different. The strategic priorities transcend what is going on in the world. It would be very difficult for any project to be told...put that on the back burner. But for a group to decide in half an hour that they are not needed..that's a lot of work has gone in' (Managing Director)

'Rather than mothballing or canning them....Anne [Executive Director Legal Services] has a view on hers that we might..' (Executive Director Technology)

'It's important that each project goes off and says what it feels it's going to do and gets clear on what can be delivered by when..the sponsor will say what they are going to do..the sponsor recommends this...' (Managing Director)

'I do think that they should be picked up and maybe change their name. If the issue is about implementation...do we allow them the luxury of having another 18 months?' (Marketing Director)

The projects continued throughout 2009.

Group dynamics from leading together

What we see here is the team maintaining a separate world between two streams of strategic work as a social defence against the anxieties that collaborative work would entail. The strategic work related to the 'strategic triangle' could be maintained without manifest conflict so long as the strategic projects and debates about their effectiveness could be used as an object of criticism. The experience of one stream of 'good' work and one stream of 'bad' work represents an example of splitting and projection. The confrontation between the New Talent project team and the senior team highlighted the sophisticated basic-assumption 'fight-flight' behaviour of the senior team (see description on pp.125-126) – related to its anxiety about competition between Executive Directors. This fight-flight basic-assumption behaviour manifested itself in the scapegoating of the manager of internal recruitment. Even though it was widely known that individual Executive Directors were 'cherry picking' the best curricula vitae for themselves, the team struggled to engage in thinking that might link their behaviour with internal

recruitment. This suggests an unconscious repression of what was public knowledge. The continual reference to the projects as if they existed outside the room suggests a process of avoidance of inter-personal challenge since all five project sponsors sat within the senior team. That there was never a direct challenge to a sponsor within the senior team context suggests, despite a continual reference to slow ineffective projects, a redrawing of task and role boundaries – where the projects start and finish, what is the role of a project sponsor – in which reality is distorted. My experience of my role shifting to one of project manager of these five strategic projects perhaps supports a working hypothesis related to an avoidance of their own roles as project sponsors allowing them to distance themselves from any links between the experience of project team members and the effectiveness of the senior team.

Team member perceptions of their experience of working together

Team member evaluations of each other's behaviour are at this stage largely an individual and personal one. The Executive Director Oil and Gas and sponsor of the New Talent project does not make links between her conflict with the HR Director in terms of the project content, or for example, the novelty for the organization of having an HR Director. Instead she sees his behaviour as defensive and obstructionist. Similarly with the conflict between the New Talent project sponsor, the Executive Director Oil and Gas, and the Marketing Director – the conflict is expressed in personal terms with attributions made about the individual's suitability for this kind of senior teamwork. The scapegoating of the

manager of internal recruitment was sustained by an analysis of her behaviour at the level of individual competence. No thinking seemed possible that might link the functioning of the senior team with the work of internal recruitment. The suggestion that the senior team had created the internal recruitment department as a means to distance itself from the competition for prime candidates between Executive Directors was not easily appreciated, despite several iterations of the same interpretation.

This data strand describes how the issue of the strategic projects returned at the beginning of 2009 and remained a constant subject of discussion for the remainder of the life of the senior team. No decision was ever made about stopping or re-designing a project. No attempt was ever made to review a project against its original brief. The original five project briefs that included a detailed description of the measurable outcomes were not referred to again. From March 2007 to October 2009 these five projects were allowed to continue and, despite numerous reviews and project team presentations, no decisions to stop any one of them were made, despite the considerable amount of feelings expressed questioning their value.

Table 9 summarizes again the descriptive levels of data analysis that make up this strand and have appeared as sub-headings throughout.

Table 9: Strategic Projects: Summary of Descriptive Data

Time line	Strand 1: Strategic Projects
	Descriptive data
March 2007	Project Briefs written and approved by senior team but not referred to again
March 2007	The senior team engages in two separate streams of strategic work
March – September 2008	Tension between project sponsor and Marketing Director
March – September 2008	Tension between New Talent and Future Manager project sponsors
March – September 2008	Conflict develops between senior team and projects
March 2008	Data presented illustrates competition between Executive Directors
June – July 2008	Projects are the only agenda item for the Programme Management Group meetings
December 2008	New Executive Director is co-opted – she assumes ‘slow projects’ language
January 2009	Projects are described as ‘tail wagging the dog’
March 2008 – October 2009	Repetition of the same diagnostic

Strand 2: Career Paths

March 2008 – May 2009 (13 months)

Summary

The retention of staff was a major concern for this organization and was regarded as an adaptive challenge – turnover for managers was running at 48% against an industry average of 30%. In early 2007 a strategic project entitled Your Career was created in order to address this issue. The project sponsor was the HR Director. The HR Director had joined the company a year earlier. He was about 15 years older than other team members and had enjoyed a successful international career in HR. The project team made up of five middle managers proposed the creation of Career Paths across the organization. At the same time an external communications consultancy was invited in to help the senior team articulate its strategic 'story'. As illustrated in the first strand, tension between these two streams of work intensified. Over time, while publicly supporting the idea, strong misgivings were voiced informally about the wisdom of implementing career paths. At the same time the HR Director was strongly criticized with strong doubts about his competence discussed behind closed doors. A two-day event was planned for all managers in the company during which they would be trained in how to conduct a career paths conversation. The event proved popular and the senior team had to respond to this unexpected outcome. The Human Resources Director was asked to leave the company.

Background (October 2007 – March 2008)

The following is from the Project Brief document, approved by the senior team in October 2007.

Project Brief

To provide a progressive career structure in order to retain, develop and improve performance of our highly talented people.

A specific goal will be to increase the tenure of our top performers by offering a range of compelling reasons to stay and grow their career with us.

Objectives and baseline measures

- Improve overall retention (reduce t/o from 48% to c.35%)
- Increase tenure of top talent (from 2.5 to 3.5 years)
- Promote more senior/managing consultants (10% to 20%)
- Provide clarity of possible career opportunities
- Broaden career choice through transfers and secondments
- Improve internal and external perception of Recco as a career option

The project team worked for several months before deciding to conduct some internal research. They started by interviewing a group of 15 former employees who were considered 'good performers' who had left the company more than 12 months before and a group of current employees, also high performers.

Based on their analysis of their interview data the team proposed initiatives in four areas: career path and talent management; learning and development; management skills; and, internal communications. The first of these was given priority and further work was done to explore the possibilities for implementing

career paths in Recco. It was March 2008 before the team returned to the senior team to make a presentation of their proposals.

THE BEGINNING (March- July 2008)

The following is from the proposal in March 2008 to the senior team about how Career Paths could be introduced to the company.

Recommended strategies

Career framework and talent management strategy

1. Career maps are created within each business unit by January 2009.
2. Ensure all maps are clear and consistent and continuously referred to by line manager at a minimum of 6 monthly intervals.
3. Career maps define routes in consulting, people leadership/management and specialist roles.
4. Integrate career paths with different business models

- The implementation of career paths requires Executive Directors to support the rotation of talented individuals to other parts of the organization

The team was highly motivated and dedicated considerable time to the project. I attended several of their meetings. The idea of career paths implied the creation of an internal jobs market in which individuals would be encouraged to move to other sectors of the business. This meant that the four Executive Directors would have to be willing to support the rotation of talented individuals working for them to jobs in other parts of the business that may benefit the business as a whole and another Executive Director.

- **Tension emerges between time spent on project and other emerging strategic work**
- **Resistance to career paths is rationalized**

At a Programme Management Group meeting on 16 July 2008, an item appeared in the minutes regarding career paths; this is shown below.

Programme Management Group meeting

16 July 2008

Agreed that a senior team discussion would be needed on the timing of career map work. It was felt that there needed to be clarity on business structure and models before embarking on the detailed career map work.

Managers workshops have been developed. Topics included retention and career discussions. It was noted that this needed to take account of the work of other projects and concern was expressed over the planned timing (November 2008) which may clash with other strategic change activity. Agreed to raise as an issue at senior team meeting.

It was noted that Konrad [HR Director] had included additional items in his schedule such as an employee survey. This should be considered in the context of the overall plan of activity.

At least two points were clear at this stage. Firstly, there was increasing tension about the amount of time managers were spending on projects. An outside

consulting company, Synthesis was working with the senior team to formulate a 'story' that articulated the strategy and vision. The eventual roll out of this 'story' would demand the time of all managers in the company. The business was also performing poorly and pressure was on to engage customers more effectively – the work on the 'story' was part of a set of initiatives led by the Marketing Director to engage external market interest in a re-branded Recco. Secondly this Programme Management Group meeting saw the first expression of what was to be a process of listing all kinds of operational or strategic issues that needed to be 'clarified' before career paths could be implemented. In this way resistance was rationalized.

I wrote in my observational notes during this meeting

'They are going to bury career paths. Concern expressed over planned timing is code for "we want the managers to be doing other things such as the communications cascade of the story". This is a polite discussion and I guess they know of my relationship with Konrad [HR Director] so they are not being direct. Konrad's adding in some extra items was just a gentle way of saying he's trying to make this bigger than we want. They have no interest in career paths.'

- Anger flares up 'off'-line'

Two days later, on 18 July 2008, I had a one-to-one meeting with the HR Director and sponsor of this Your Career project. He mentioned that he had had a meeting with the Executive Director Industry and Commerce and Programme Management Group member, regarding career paths. The HR Director was furious.

'Nelson [Executive Director Technology] told me there's no point doing them [career paths] in his sector..I gave him the materials a week ago and when he came to the meeting it was clear he hadn't even looked at them! What a waste of bloody time..I've got a project team working their arses off..and I'm told the Programme Management Group aren't interested!' (HR Director)

I wrote in my observational notes:

'So two days ago the Executive Director Technology was in the Programme Management Group speaking in such a controlled professional tone how a broader discussion about the suitability of career paths would have to be discussed in the senior team. Now he goes off and speaks to Konrad [HR Director] without waiting for the senior team discussion. I wonder if Nelson was aware of whether he spoke to Konrad in his role as a Programme Management Group member or as an Executive Director?'

At the Programme Management Group meeting one week later on 23 July 2008, I asked the Executive Director Technology this very question.

'Well, I didn't really think about it.'

'Konrad [HR Director] didn't seem very happy after he met you...what happened?'
(DF)

'Well, career paths aren't going to work..right now..the project group says that everyone is doing them but I don't think they're working anywhere..'

- An all or nothing proposal from the project sponsor – the HR Director

While this was happening the work with the communications consultancy Synthesis was developing and the senior team was being asked to attend preparatory meetings to begin to discuss the ‘story’ of the company vision they would like to articulate. The management population that would be asked to engage with this process of creating the story was that same population of 23 top managers currently working on the strategic projects. The next section of this strand – the ‘middle’ relates to the build up to the training that was part of the project team’s proposal – that all managers would have training in how to conduct conversations with their employees about career paths.

In an email written on 28 July 2008, the HR Director wrote to the Executive Director Technology regarding feedback from the Managing Director and the Marketing Director:

‘I understand that Graham [Managing Director] and Faruk [Marketing Director] felt that the project team strategy was too programmatic and the timing of the roll out clashed with other strategic work.

The project team is adamant that this is a strategy that will make a significant impact on retaining talent, providing clear financial benefits and differentiate Recco as a career of choice in the industry.

Whilst employee turnover has been over 40% for some years now, no effort has changed this. Therefore the team feels that any attempt to do 'bits of it' will be futile and would rather shelve it for a time when the organisation feels it is ready.

Meanwhile, I will keep you in the loop with progress. Attached is the training element of the strategy.'

THE MIDDLE (November 2008 – April 2009)

In the minutes of the Programme Management Group on 3 November 2008, a note was made regarding career paths. This is shown below.

Programme Management Group meeting

3 November 2008

Career Maps: Faruk [Marketing Director] - there needs to be some clarity around these maps. A note from Konrad [HR Director] suggests that there is work going on around Career Maps. Nelson [Executive Director Technology] says it's important to know what is going on because it is linked to redeployment – transfers and Career Mapping is important in the light of changes that are happening

The proposed intervention in the organization involved five stages, requiring a book called 'Inspiring Managers' to be read, and a 360 degree data gathering process that together would provide the inputs to a two-day training supported by web based video and finally an additional one-day training follow up. The Managing Director decided that this would be just a one-off two-day training with no follow up day.

- A split between what is said in private and what is declared in public

Noteworthy was the split between public declarations and 'off-line' statements. In private I was being told quite directly by the Executive Director Legal Services, that

the HR Director '*...is useless*', by the Managing Director, '*I think that Konrad [HR Director] is just defensive..you can't say anything, you can't have a discussion with him*', by Mara, '*I know I shouldn't say this about a colleague but I really find him difficult to work with..he just doesn't have it..the quality is not there..*'. While the Marketing Director and the Executive Director Technology were more circumspect, comments like this made in their hearing either led to head nodding or what seemed like a consensual silence – nothing was said in his defense. When the HR Director was invited to the next meeting, no challenge was made to him. He was asked to update the Programme Management Group and did so at length. In the background discussions were beginning that would lead to his being fired.

- The design proposed by the HR Director is for a cultural change programme and is thus potentially provocative

I did not attend the Programme Management Group to which the HR Director was invited on 24 November 2008. An item from the minutes, shown below, however, suggests that he explained the proposals but there was little debate.

Project Management Group meeting

24 November 2008

Your Career

Konrad [HR Director] provided an update on the project.

This project is trying to bring about a mindset change in career management as much as anything else.

The 2 day programme in February will help instigate that. It is not solely concerned with holding career discussions, it is about developing inspirational managers who are able to maximise talent.

Graham[Managing Director] advised they should not include it as part of Feb programme without senior team 'signing it off' first.

The lack of critical commentary at this meeting contrasts with the critical debate at Programme Management Group meetings before and after this meeting (when the HR Director was not present). The final sentence from the Managing Director, however, suggests that the decision would occur in the senior team.

What is clear, however, is that the HR Director indicates that the project team's aim is to bring about a mindset change – a cultural change programme. My experience at the time was one of feeling that this programme had something aggressive implicit in its design as if to say 'look at what our project can do!'

- **The wider management population responds well to the two-day training event**

Programme Management Group meeting

12 January 2009

Referring to the January Briefing, Clive [interim staff member supporting Managing Director] started by saying that there had been more questions than usual regarding career paths from the Your Career project. It was all generally positive – with people saying it was long overdue. There were questions about whether internal transfers were being supported by the company.

The next reference to the career paths was at the Programme Management Group meeting on 12 January 2009. Before the two-day training event managers were provided with materials to help them to think about the career path issues. The response to these materials from the wider management population was positive, as reported here.

This positive view held by the wider population even before the training begins is picked up later in the post-event discussions in the senior team. The senior team's response to this positive view plays an important role toward the end of this strand of data.

- 360 feedback method is used to give the HR Director very negative feedback

Before the actual meeting itself, the senior team members were very tense because the methodology involved each senior team member giving and receiving feedback. The process involved one team member collecting feedback from all other team members about one other member. The recently hired Executive Director Accounting and Finance, was chosen to collect feedback from all other team members to give to the HR Director. At a one-to-one meeting with the Managing Director, he informed me:

'Linda's [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] really shocked about the feedback for Konrad [HR Director]..apparently its horrific..'

In a one-to-one meeting with the Executive Director Oil and Gas at the same time, we had the following exchange written down in the meeting and then written up more fully immediately afterwards:

'Oh god, I suppose you've heard..?' (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

'No, what do you mean?' (DF)

'About Konrad [HR Director]?' (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

'Yes, I've heard a few things..' (DF)

'I think Graham [Managing Director] has come to the conclusion that maybe there is not really a fit with the company. Linda [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] has been around to talk to everyone as you know..it's part of it..and she's shocked by

the feedback about Konrad [HR Director]. Do you think I've been mean? I mean I just felt I had to be honest..do you think I am mean?' ' (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

'Well, I don't know what's been said so..' (DF)

'I don't want to say anything but it's been really hard..he just puts up obstruction after obstruction and on the project we're left to do stuff that is really his day job..I am not the HR Director' (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

In a one-to-one meeting with the Executive Director Legal Services and sponsor of the 'Perm' (permanent recruitment) project. Her view of the HR Director was categorical:

'Well to be frank he's bloody useless...he's kind of not interested..doing his own thing and not paying attention to what anyone else wants..in his own world really!'
(laughs)

- Senior team publicly support career paths but privately plan to minimize their participation

At the same time, in preparation for the two-day training at which this feedback process would take place, the senior team members who attended the Programme Management Group were preparing to avoid as much of the day as possible. They planned to miss the first few hours so that they could work more on the prioritizing of initiatives that was proving such a challenge to the senior team.

I felt angry as I was uncomfortable about the split between what was being said in public and what was being said in private. While the project sponsor was being fired and there were strong reservations about career paths as an initiative, the following was written for the Monthly Briefing document for April 2009. This document was read out as a communication cascade to every manager and then to every employee once a month.

MONTHLY BRIEFING DOCUMENT

April 2009

Your Career

The entire management team has now attended a two-day 'talent management' workshop. The aim is that managers become experts at having conversations about individual careers, identifying talent at all levels within the business, and encouraging people to explore the opportunities within Recco to further their development and careers. The reason for this is that many leavers have told us that they would have stayed had opportunities been available to them and had internal moves been easier to make. These opportunities often existed, and by training managers to have these conversations, we aim to encourage people's development and careers more within the company, rather than having them seek roles elsewhere. One of the actions agreed is that, in future, managers will take the opportunity to discuss individual aspirations and possible career plans in appraisals and personal development meetings as appropriate.

THE END (March 2009 – May 2009)

The end of this strand is related to how the senior team makes sense of the subsequent positive feedback from the wider management population about the career paths training. In addition the firing of the HR Director and project sponsor has to be managed – how will the career paths initiative be taken forward?

- Senior team members doubt the validity of the positive feedback about the career paths training event

On 16 March 2009 at a meeting of the Programme Management Group I took the following observational notes. It begins with a sceptical comment from the Marketing Director in which he suggests that the managers will be motivated only by self interest and getting ahead.

'I can imagine managers reading that out. When can I have mine? When will I be promoted? We've already had feedback that people are looking to have their own conversation before they run them with their people'. (Marketing Director)

'How the hell are we going to measure the effectiveness of these career paths? A communications plan of when these meetings are to take place..I haven't asked my people when they are going to do their conversations' (Executive Director Technology)

There was a discussion then about the more general impact of the career paths intervention. The Managing Director however, challenged the evolving view that

the training was wrong for the company. He also mentioned that the external consultant who had helped design and facilitate the two-day training had observed something about the culture of the company that might be worth reflecting on.

'Who is going to take over Your Career project and what is the follow up of this career path work for the senior team..what are we going to do? What actually happened is that the external facilitator picked up something about us..the parental culture..we need to think of the generic learning on that day and what it means for us as a group. If we think it is just for the managers..it's also for Executive Directors...us.. and our subordinates.. (Managing Director)

A month later however, it seemed that this advice was not heeded. Thus on 7 April 2009 the following was recorded in the minutes of the Programme Management Group:

The Programme Management Group meeting

7 April 2009

It was noted that one of the responses to the career conversations that were modeled on the recent two-day development module was for managers to ask about when they would receive such a conversation. They thought about themselves before they thought about running such conversations for others.

The Programme Management Group and senior team members were discounting the value of the training and suggesting that even though the feedback was good, it

could not be trusted since the managers were irresponsible and only interested in themselves. This seemed particularly difficult since they had as a senior team seen no value in the career paths initiative in general and the training in particular. They were also dealing with their collective dislike of the HR Director who had been fired by the CEO.

- Discussion about the HR Director's leaving is avoided

The final discussion about the Your Career project came on 11 May 2009 just a month after the project sponsor and HR Director had been fired. Instead of discussing the training directly, the discussion focussed on the various meanings of 'development'. There was no reflection on the role of the senior team throughout this process. What the minutes below do not show is that the conversation about the meaning of development went on for 45 minutes thus taking up most of the meeting. The meeting was attended by the Managing Director, and in addition to the permanent members – the Marketing Director, the Executive Director Technology, and the Executive Director Accounting and Finance also attended. As part of a review of the Your Career project, a discussion of what development might mean in the case of a manager ensued. The item recorded in the minutes by me is shown below.

Programme Management Group meeting

11 May 2009

Review of Your Career project

The PMG debated for some time what 'development' means. Graham [Managing Director] called this issue 'real development'. There have previously been discussions about a qualification, a lack of feedback and the lack of on the desk training. DF made the comment that historically the word development in the company has been used to mean career advancement. Linda [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] remarked that development should be related to skills.

However it was felt that there is a danger that the work on having 'difficult conversations' and other aspects of Your Career might be lost following the two-day workshop. Linda suggested that it was not based on the current issues facing the organization.

DF commented that it is difficult to analyse the project from the content point of view without taking into account the recent departure of the sponsor, the company's HR Director.

I wrote a short analytic memo to myself as I left this meeting.

'This conversation felt as if it was 'heady' or intellectual and I got pulled into it myself...it was about opinions of the theory of what 'development' means. What started out as a review of the project turns into something else. It felt like a conversation of one kind in order to avoid another kind of conversation. Konrad [HR Director] has just been fired and no one was talking about him even though he was the sponsor. It felt like the project was being carefully packed away and being closed down. That's why I made my last comment about him. I could feel the atmosphere change when I said it.'

The group dynamics of working together

This strand shows the way in which basic assumption fight-flight behaviour (as described on pp. 125-126) can provide the team with the veneer of effective action while allowing for anxieties engendered by the implementation of career paths to be managed. The senior team members struggled to articulate their misgivings about career paths. Instead of openly challenging the timing and content of the intervention, team members spoke in private rather than using the existing institutional arrangements – the Programme Management Group and the monthly senior team meetings – to debate these priorities. Instead, the anxiety in facing each other in their roles was reduced by a regression into a scapegoating dynamic. The very act of firing the HR Director was an enactment of the very fears that the career paths engendered – that the implementation of career paths would expose them as incompetent. The wish to avoid direct confrontation with the HR Director extended to the point of selecting the newest Executive Director to inform the HR Director of the very negative feedback. The denigration of the positive feedback

from the wider management population regarding the career paths training days was part of an ongoing projection of irresponsibility and immaturity onto the management population that provided a sense of solidarity to the senior team. The discussion of the various possible meanings of ‘development’ was an intellectualization – a defense against feelings of shame in relation to the scapegoating of the HR Director.

Team members’ perceptions of their experience

Apart from the Executive Director Oil and Gas’s feelings of guilt about her participation in the firing of the HR Director, there were few reflections from team members about their own behaviour in relation to the undermining of the career paths initiative. The juxtaposition of cost-cutting measures in the latter part of 2008 and proposals to spend money on travel and accommodation costs for 60 managers was not incongruous for team members – at least there was no discussion of this. There was support for this expenditure, despite the very clear wish not to participate in the initiative. The use of the 360 process as a means to give feedback to one team member was not remarked on. The Executive Director Technology’s reflections on his remarks to the HR Director did not portray any awareness of how this might have been noteworthy. At this stage there was little in the perceptions of team members that extended beyond an analysis of each other’s behaviour based on attributions regarding personal psychologies.

This second strand covered a period of 13 months during which the aspiration of the company to address an adaptive challenge related to poor retention rates for

managers remained unaddressed. The strategic project team had worked hard to present an argument for interventions using a range of methods including career paths. In the 13 months no innovation relating to career paths was implemented. No alternative manner of addressing the issue of retention of managers was proposed. The table below summarizes the descriptive level data contained within this strand.

Table 10: Career Paths: Summary of Descriptive data

Strand 2: Time line	Career Paths
	Descriptive data
March 2008	The proposed implementation of career paths requires Executive Directors to support the rotation of talented individuals to other parts of the organization
July 2008	Tension emerges between time spent on project and other emerging strategic work
July 2008	Resistance to career paths is rationalized
July 2008	Anger flares up 'off-line'
July 2008	An all or nothing proposal from the project sponsor – the HR Director
November 2008	A split between what is said in private and what is declared in public
November 2008	The design proposed by the HR Director is for a cultural change programme and is thus potentially provocative
January 2009	The wider management population responds well to the two-day training event
January 2009	360 feedback method is used to give the HR Director very negative feedback
January-April 2009	Senior team publicly support Career Paths but privately plan to minimize their participation
March-April 2009	Senior team members doubt the validity of the positive feedback about the career paths training event
May 2009	Discussion about the HR Director's leaving is avoided

Strand 3: Strategic Priorities

December 2008 – October 2009 (13 months)

Summary

This strand presents data related to the formation of a set of strategic priorities for the company and for the senior team. The Managing Director could have formulated these priorities alone, but instead he insisted that the team work to create these priorities. By mid 2008 the Programme Management Group that meets on Monday mornings is making use of a spreadsheet document referred to as 'the Gantt chart' on which each line item corresponds to a task for which the senior team as a whole has 'shared accountability'. As mentioned previously, I refer to these tasks as shared accountability tasks and shared leadership tasks.

An enthusiastic start in December 2008 leads to disappointment later when it is realized that the apparently agreed on priorities have not been disseminated as planned. In March 2009 the senior team engages in discussions around the priorities but ultimately prefers that the final decision is made at the Programme Management Group. At a subsequent Programme Management Group meeting, the suggestion is made that the Managing Director makes the final decision. Willingly accepting, the Managing Director makes a presentation that is met with silence. Later in 2009 in October the Managing Director reflects on how the failure to agree a set of priorities is less to do with not having the right decision-making 'tool' and more to do with 'stuff under the ice-berg'. This strand heralds the beginning of the senior team's reflections and its concerns about its own performance.

Background

This strand describes the group dynamics associated with the task of identifying and implementing the 'strategic priorities' for 2009. The five strategic projects had been going for 18 months with few tangible results. Many new initiatives had been developed with pressure on managers throughout the organization to adopt many new practices requiring their time and energy. The issues of 'overload' and priorities thus became important.

By December 2008 the senior team had successfully run three workshops supported by the external communications consultancy Synthesis. These workshops had centred around a vision 'story' which was successfully turned into a communications cascade involving all managers in the company. There was considerable tension between the demands that managers participate in such new market oriented activities and those related to the projects.

This strand includes data from Programme Management Group meetings, the formal minutes of the senior team meetings, my own observational notes of those meetings, monthly briefing documents and related one-to-one discussions with team members, particularly the Managing Director.

THE BEGINNING (December 2008 – January 2009)

- Senior team member's reflections on their team performance at the end of the full day meeting are upbeat

This strand begins at a senior team meeting in December 2008. The Executive Director Accounting and Finance, who was not yet officially part of the team attended the meeting as a full participant. The team's assessment of the day recorded in the official minutes, written by the Managing Director's personal assistant is shown below.

Senior Team Meeting minutes

17 December 2008

It was noted that the meeting was better than the last. Less interruption. More purpose and objectives. Good discussion particularly around projects. Presentation very good from groups. Good time-keeping and involvement from the Chair (Marketing Director) in moving the group forward and to decision. It was noted that the group was passionate at times and that this shouldn't be curbed. Continue to review last meeting at start of future meetings. Review agenda and tailor where necessary at the outset.

- The team has a lot of energy for collective action directed at the general management population

Much of this enthusiasm and good feeling was associated, as it often was, with planning to communicate something to the managers. Themes such as 'accountability', 'zero tolerance' and 'under-performance' in the management

population seemed to galvanize the team. The following extract is from the point in the team meeting when the energy or 'passion' in the room, as it is referred to above, is at its highest. The team here are finalising the contents of a soon to be held managers' meeting, to be attended by all 60 managers and at which the strategic priorities for 2009 would be communicated to them.

'Is there an opportunity here to direct people so that they get back in January and hit the ground running? We are going to lose ground if we don't encourage people to have..' (Executive Director Accounting and Finance)

We could put that in the meeting..' (general agreement) (Managing Director)

Almost a manic level of activity' (Executive Director Accounting and Finance)

A lot of managers have holidays at this time..' (Executive Director Technology)

Is that something like..is it like a shopping list? These are the things that you have to do.. (general agreement). If they are in holiday mode..so why don't we give them...from 5th January' (Executive Director Accounting and Finance)

We accrue holiday so we get them to work.. (Executive Director Technology)

So we just don't.. (Executive Director Accounting and Finance)

There is quite a lot of pressure on teams as to what their figures will be (Executive Director Legal Services)

Given that this is Thursday morning. So what should we include about this? (Managing Director)

Underperformance, zero tolerance (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

Something around a call to arms...work our nuts off..excuse my language! (Executive Director Technology)

No that's good' (Executive Director Accounting and Finance)

But what specifically (Managing Director)

Performance Management.. (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

Maybe the other one is Customer (general agreement) (Executive Director Accounting and Finance)

I had a catch up with my managers. They said that overall there is a huge swathe of people who are underperforming' (Executive Director Technology)

In my role in this meeting I was also swept up in this enthusiasm and could understand why at the end of the day there was a sense of hope that this team could make a difference to the way the organization was working.

Six months later in mid-2009, the senior team sits in a more sombre mood. The Managing Director speaks about feedback from another Managers' Meeting in which there is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest that not only the team level managers but the Associate Directors and Senior Managers that report into the Executive Directors are unable to say what the priorities are.

'Well if they don't know the priorities, then how can there be any hope that the managers will be able to tell their teams. And if the Associate Directors and Senior Managers don't know then it suggests that we haven't communicated them.'
(Managing Director)

And in a one-to-one meeting with the Managing Director the following day.

'I was really shocked..after six months I'm being told that they are not really perceived as company priorities but as my priorities.' *(Managing Director)*

The Middle and End of this strand describe the related events in the period from this first senior team meeting in December 2008 to late 2009.

THE MIDDLE (February 2009)

- There is a perception that there are too many initiatives and a need to prioritize

Having described the enthusiasm of the December 2008 senior team meeting, the issue of prioritizing was taken up again in the first senior team meeting of 2009 following the New Year break. The main concern was that the company was struggling and managers are taking too much time away from the business to attend meetings not directly related to the making of money. I did not attend this meeting. However, the official minutes confirm the Managing Director being concerned and that the senior team find a way to prioritize the increasing number

of initiatives identified by the senior team requires attention. These initiatives were recorded on a spreadsheet document referred to as 'the Gantt chart' – a widely used tool for project management.

- The Programme Management Group develop a set of criteria for the prioritization process

At the Programme Management Group meeting of 9 February 2009 the following was recorded in the minutes as a summary of the work at the senior team meeting:

The Programme Management Group meeting

9 February 2009

There are too many internal meetings and too many initiatives going on concurrently.

A set of tools is required which will facilitate a decision making process around priorities. The Gantt Chart while useful cannot display all the information necessary to allow this decision-making process to occur.

Graham [Managing Director] expressed concern about how these decisions around priorities could be made if they are all important? How do we balance out the relative importance around short term results and getting the strategy right?

A week later at a Programme Management Group meeting at which the Managing Director was not present, the other three permanent members, the Marketing

Director, the Executive Director Technology and myself set about creating an approach to help the senior team go about prioritizing. The following was recorded in the minutes:

Programme Management Group meeting

16 February 2009

Nelson [Executive Director Technology] mentioned that Linda [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] has a very firm view that our management has a lot of time spent on meetings when they should be in the trenches. Both Faruk [the Marketing Director] and Nelson expressed agreement with this and it was suggested that there is general agreement.

The opinion of the recently appointed Executive Director Accounting and Finance, new to the company, was considered important. Her co-option, described in the first strand on 'strategic projects', was effective to the extent that in December 2008 she said during the senior team meeting:

'We have to manage performance...and it mustn't be a project' (looking at that moment directly at me).

I wrote in my own notes:

'This is a company in which the word project has come to be synonymous with something wasteful, inefficient, and undesirable. Linda's [Executive Director

Accounting and Finance] glance at me suggests that these projects are firmly associated with me and that she has been co-opted'.

I was convinced that the discussion around the prioritization was a proxy for an attack on the projects. This feeling of being marginalised in my role and being strongly associated with the projects was further reinforced as this meeting of the Programme Management Group continued. We decided that the best way to approach prioritization was to present the senior team with a set of criteria for prioritization as a first step. We prepared a list of potential 'strawman' criteria to present to the senior team in the coming days. This appeared in the minutes and is shown below.

Programme Management Group meeting

16 February 2009

The Programme Management Group agreed to spend time on developing a 'strawman' list of criteria for the senior team to work on. This list included:

1. Impact on the company performance short term / long term (revenue)
2. Ease of implementation / and speed
3. Resources requirements – how much non-board input requirement
4. Direct Costs
5. Impact on people / re-organisation
6. Surgical versus company wide-transformational
7. Adaptive or technical
8. Will help us achieve our strategic goals
9. Interdependency – if we stop or carry on
10. Provides clarity to people in the business – generally what you should be doing now

- In my role I experience the formulation of the criteria as an attack on the strategic projects

I wrote down in my observational notes:

'I am feeling isolated and watching all the language that I have introduced to the company subsumed by other language – even the technical and adaptive was discussed as just part of 'ease of implementation'. I had to fight to hold onto it. Fortunately Nelson [the Executive Director Technology] is willing to disagree with Faruk [Marketing Director] about anything and supported holding on to the technical-adaptive idea'.

- The Programme Management Group assesses its own authority with the senior team

The discussion between the Executive Director Technology and the Marketing Director about the approach to take at the forthcoming senior team meeting says something about the experience of being a member of the Programme Management Group. The Executive Director Technology takes a more cautious approach and tries to temper the Marketing Director's willingness to be more directive to the senior team.

'I don't think this will work....Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] and Konrad [HR Director] are massively emotionally and professionally engaged in their projects. While the importance of the senior team making this decision is that they will feel involved. Let's say I have been running the projects for a year...and now the senior team is telling me I am canning it but I don't need to look in the mirror. There is

something around the learning here that I might lose..do you follow me?' ' (Executive Director Technology)

'Do you think we will can anything?' (Marketing Director)

'If we are not going to can anything...and then we review priorities at the end of it all and we are saying we are doing everything....that's not going to work..' (Executive Director Technology)

'Potentially we could show more assertiveness by proposing some weighting...if we get through that quite quickly..people may say it's quite sensible..' (Marketing Director)

'I think what you'll get is that people will push back..' (Executive Director Technology)

A week later on 17 February, the following item was recorded in the minutes of the senior team meeting.

Senior Team Meeting minutes

17 February 2009

Work underway to put in place a set of criteria to prioritise our priorities in terms of ranking, resourcing, overloading and to ensure we are focussed on the right things. Programme Management Group (PMG) to work up output of two senior team groups at next PMG meeting and come back to senior team with proposal on weighting. PMG authorised by the senior team to conduct work and solicit feedback necessary to get buy-in. PMG to make recommendation for sign off at the March senior team meeting.

As the note from the minutes above indicates, the outcome of this meeting was that the Programme Management Group was asked to take back the list of criteria agreed by the senior team and come back and present a recommendation to be 'signed off' by the senior team at the next month's senior team meeting. The following describes events around this issue at the senior team meeting.

At this senior team meeting, the Executive Director Technology and member of the Programme Management Group proposed two sub-groups of the senior team to work on the 'strawman' list of criteria. Both groups suggested modifications to the list. I moved between both groups to observe and take notes. The atmosphere was giddy and there was a lot of excitement. The Executive Director Accounting and

Finance was new in her role and her presence was already making a considerable impact. She was in the same sub-group as the Managing Director tasked with discussing the criteria for prioritization.

- There is a strong challenge to Managing Director's leadership in senior team meeting

At one point she asked the Managing Director a question:

'Let me ask you a question Graham [Managing Director]. If there was some initiative that was important in the medium term for the success of the business...would you spend the money?' (Long silence)

'I don't know exactly'. (Managing Director)

I wrote down in my notes:

'Feels like a strong challenge to his leadership'. It felt like an intense moment for the team – as if she had spoken in a way that no one else would dare and everyone was waiting to see how the Managing Director would react.'

Then the groups reported out after their 20-minute sessions discussing the list of criteria. In the report out the following exchanges felt meaningful:

- The senior team assign the task of prioritization back to the Programme Management Group

'What's next? We should pull it all together'. (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

'It would be great to do the work to the point where we are agreed'. (Managing Director)

'We've talked in the Programme Management Group about the balance between the authority of the PMG and the deep connection that people feel toward the projects..it's not easy (Executive Director Technology)

'Is the Programme Management Group the right forum to do that? Shouldn't we do this? (Executive Director Accounting and Finance)

'If there is value-added in getting our input...but I'm fine with the PMG preparing something for our approval next time..and if you need our input.. (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

'You should be included from time to time. We want it to be an open forum. (Managing Director)

'What is the PMG? Who is in it? (Executive Director Accounting and Finance)

Graham, [Managing Director] myself [Executive Director Technology] and Faruk [Marketing Director] are the permanent members. (Executive Director Technology)

'Is it a communications body?' (Executive Director Accounting and Finance)

'No, it's a group that monitors progress on the initiatives that we have going..so it's not about communications..' (Marketing Director)

'The PMG is a subset of this meeting.... and on that note..as I understand it the PMG should take the criteria and come up with a reconsidered list based on today's discussions and come up with a list that is approved by everyone..we will seek clarity for specific areas..through email. (Managing Director)

(General agreement)

I wrote in a theoretical note written the day after this senior team meeting:

'That questions about the purpose of the Programme Management Group are asked after almost a year of its existence, it's membership not understood and its name – 'Project Management Group' – confused, is remarkable. The experience of its permanent members reporting feeling like 'plonkers' when trying to report to the work of the Programme Management Group to the senior team, highlights the difficulty in any single individual or sub-group taking up authority on behalf of the team. Sending back the prioritization task to the Programme Management Group – which has so little authority – feels like a set up. It felt like a room with a lot of suppressed aggression but also hopelessness. My guess is that this is going nowhere. How will they explain this to themselves?'

THE END (23rd February 2009 – 5 October 2009)

At the next Programme Management Group meeting where the task of integrating the work of the two sub-groups at the February senior team meeting was taken up, I recorded the following comment by the Managing Director in my observational notes:

'It would be better that we can find a way of making this happen rather than saying these are the wrong things..I know that's not quite what the senior team asked us to do...'(Managing Director)

What was finally recorded in the minutes was this:

Programme Management Group meeting

23 February 2009

A discussion developed which asked the question as to whether the task was to reduce the number of initiatives or to re-think the approach that was taken so that all of them could be addressed in some way.

Nelson [Executive Director Technology] suggested by way of example that Recco wouldn't stop doing 'business models' as these would be part of a cascade within his own area. They didn't necessarily have to be part of the work of the team as a whole.

- The Managing Director accepts the proposal that he decides on the prioritization

This is an example of times where the Managing Director seemed reluctant to say that anything was not a priority – everything was important. On 16 March, the day before the next senior team meeting, the Programme Management Group met again. The long discussion about priorities at the previous meeting was contrasted with a relatively short discussion which ended with the Executive Director Technology proposing that the Managing Director take all the inputs from the last senior team meeting and whatever emailed suggestions he had received and come up with a proposal. It felt like a critical moment as the prioritization initiative that had originally started at the Programme Management Group and taken to the senior team to be agreed finally was given back to the Managing Director to deal with. As written in my observational notes during the meeting:

‘Graham [Managing Director] says he has received all the inputs from everyone’.

‘The senior team is comfortable with us doing that’ (Managing Director)

‘Maybe you could basically do this and we could sense check it’ (Executive Director Technology)

‘I am very happy to do that. Very happy to do that’ (Managing Director).

‘Ok. Cool’. (Executive Director Technology)

‘Would you be able to do that today Graham? If you could send it to us by the end of the day and then maybe we could see if anyone has got any major problems with

that. I think there is a real appetite for this. Review the priorities and then consider the implementation'. (Executive Director Technology)

'Thank you PMG for giving me that authority' (Managing Director) (all laugh).

This last comment and the laughter are quite ironic, given what was subsequently to happen. The Managing Director, having been 'authorized' by the Programme Management Group to come up with a set of priorities, prepared a presentation for the senior team meeting the next day.

- The Managing Director's presentation is not engaged with

At the senior team meeting on 17th March 2009 the Managing Director gave his presentation of 10 slides on the prioritization of initiatives. He based his analysis on the criteria agreed by the senior team at the March meeting one month previously. There were three primary criteria – 'short-term impact on performance', 'medium impact on performance' and 'enables achievement of strategic goals'; and two secondary criteria – 'ease and speed of implementation' and 'resource requirements'. Then each of the 15 shared accountability tasks that were being currently prioritized on the Gantt chart was given a score of 1 to 5 against these criteria. Permanent Recruitment Strategy for example was given a score of between 1 and 5 across each of the three primary criteria that gave a total of 12. The total for the two secondary criteria was 8. Extra weighting was added to the primary criteria total (double) and the total divided by 2. Each task ended up with a number between 10 and 16.5. As a result almost all of the shared

leadership accountability tasks had sufficiently high scores that meant that almost everything would be continued. On a later slide it was suggested what percentage of their time senior team members should spend on these tasks.

Strategic Priorities presentation slide 13

Senior team members should commit 8.3% of their working hours in Q2

The whole of the Recco management team (all managers at all levels) will spend 3% of their time on these initiatives

The presentation was received mainly in silence. I wrote in my own observational notes

'No one is talking..heavy silence.'

The perception was that everything was being prioritized with 13 of the shared accountability tasks receiving over 15 and two items with 14.5. At the end of the presentation and the lack of energy and engagement, I asked the Managing Director how he felt. He said in front of the team:

'I feel set up.'

From the moment the previous day when the Managing Director had accepted to take up the prioritization process I had felt it likely that the outcome of the presentation would be negative. The Managing Director's comment about feeling set up came with only a few minutes to go to the full day senior team meeting. Although there was no response from team members, the mood seemed sombre. I was already formulating a hypothesis related to the anxiety felt by team members in engaging with this process of prioritization. I felt they were frustrated with the Managing Director and wanted him to take up his role differently – more akin to a traditional top-down leader who would make decisions for them.

- Team members are frustrated

As the Executive Director Oil and Gas described in a one-to-one meeting shortly after the senior team meeting:

'Well there weren't any priorities were there? It was a joke..we are basically doing exactly what we said we wouldn't do! We are doing everything apparently and the implication is that we are not managing our people properly..maybe I should delegate more. And bloody Linda [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] certainly took the opportunity to dig her heels into me..charming. Graham's [Managing Director] so weak, he is letting her do what she likes' (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

In a one-to-one meeting with the Managing Director the following day, he said:

'So it's a team only when it's useful to be a team and the rest of the time it's someone else's problem.' (Managing Director)

The final part of this strand of data comes from two Programme Management Group meetings that followed and a one-to-one meeting with the Managing Director. It felt as if there was an attempt to repair any damage that may have been done to the relationship with the Managing Director following his perception that he had been 'set-up'.

Programme Management Group meeting 23 March 2009

The first of these Programme Management Group meetings on 23 March 2009 was tense. The members of the team, particularly the Executive Director Technology, tried hard to reassure the Managing Director that the 'pushback' wasn't personal. I wrote in an observational note immediately after the meeting the beginnings of a working hypothesis.

'They're in denial. Denial of their own anger. There seems a terrible fear as if some terrible damage has been done. My guess right now is that there is a strong projective element here – they are frustrated with the Managing Director but imagine it's him who's angry. Their fear is that they've finally exposed their anger and he's on to them.'

The following item appeared in the minutes as a summary of the discussion. Its language suggests an attempt to claim that there are no strong feelings directed

toward the Managing Director – instead it is more a frustration with themselves for not being able to co-ordinate themselves better.

Programme Management Group meeting

23 March 2009

The senior team was positive about the priorities set out by Graham [Managing Director] at the meeting. Push back was not about the priorities but about the capacity to deliver even the smaller list of things. Discussed this and recognize that the reason for the concern is a desire to do these things thoroughly. We feel we need to soldier on with the top priorities and find a way as none of them can be postponed, we need to look closely at how the work is shared out and lessen the workload for some (Graham's work previously circulated). If we are able to better share out workload we believe the goals are achievable.

- The Executive Director Technology attempts to reassert the Managing Director's authority

The following week, at another Project Management Group meeting on 30 March 2009, the Managing Director was absent. The Executive Director Technology seemed to speak as if he represented the Managing Director. He portrayed the Managing Director as being very much in charge and therefore the senior team just had to get on with what they've been told to do. As recorded in my observational notes from the meeting:

'Nelson [Executive Director Technology] started off by saying that Graham [Managing Director] has basically decided to push on and "he's the boss"' so....'

'Our task today is get some clarity about what should be happening and when. This is for the May senior team meeting – meeting for everyone to consider and agree.' (Executive Director Technology)

From my theoretical notes written later that day:

'There were silences that didn't get easily filled. It felt that Nelson [Executive Director Technology] did most of the talking. It feels that Graham [Managing Director] is being pushed into being more decisive which everyone at one level likes but it also doesn't want – basic assumption dependency – they want to be dependent on him but resent the dependence at the same time.'

The Executive Director Technology in particular was driving through the Managing

Director's list of priorities, and those shared accountability tasks on the Gantt chart that had received more than 15 points according to the Managing Director's formulation and weighting of criteria for prioritization. The Marketing Director asked several pointed questions. It was quite a highly charged meeting.

Finally, this strand of data ends with the reflections of the Managing Director in a one-to-one meeting on 5 October 2009.

One-to-one meeting with Managing Director 5 October 2009

Following a difficult off-site meeting during which the senior team finally began to confront its own internal issues, the Managing Director reflected on the experience of December 2008 at the senior team meeting detailed at the beginning of this strand. At that meeting the team had seemed enthusiastic about galvanizing the broader management population to a 'call to arms' and to 'hit the ground running'. The Managing Director reflected soberly on these events. I recorded in my observational notes:

'We also talked about the 2009 Priorities and the December 2008 team meeting again. Graham said we could have half a day to learn just about that one item. They discussed the discussion they had had and then asked so what happened? The discussion was a long one and was about 'if only I could have kept in mind...' My point was that I remembered the meeting and the euphoria that ensued about 'hitting the ground running' and 'getting it into the company's DNA'. So how 6 months later it all

fell apart cannot be understood in terms of 'we don't have the right planning tool!' but it's related to the more under the iceberg stuff'.

This third strand of data represents the beginning of an increasing awareness amongst the team that its own functioning was problematic. Below I outline some of the explanatory theory that was developing during the course of the experiences that constitute this strand of descriptive data. A more comprehensive outline of interpretive theory linked to these strands is reserved for the next chapter.

The group dynamics of working together

This strand shows how the senior team was able to enjoy a few moments of joining around a purposeful message to the management population regarding the priorities for the company. The subsequent disappointment shows the illusory nature of this joining and its basis in projective dynamics (as described on p. 114) in which the broader population is the target of fantasies of a lack of focus and accountability. When it was realized that senior team members had not followed up with these priorities then questions regarding the functioning of the senior team began. The difficulty with calibrating the amount of direction the Programme Management Group should give the senior team, represents a parallel process whereby the senior team is seen as in need of 'parental' guidance. The senior team deals with feelings of impotence by projecting incompetence onto the wider management population and now as a parallel process, the Programme Management Group does the same to the senior team. The decision to hand back the prioritization process to the Programme Management Group, despite doubts

about the purpose of this group, suggest a stepping away from the task boundaries of roles – the senior team members are willing to work in sub-groups to prepare priorities but not to work in a full team to finalize a list. The subsequent ‘setting up’ of the Managing Director to make the decision represents a retreat into basic-assumption dependency in which the team acts as if they are unable to function without the direction of their leader. The Managing Director does not see the trap and accepts the projections of the leader that can save the team.

Team members’ perceptions of their experience

Team members’ perceptions begin to become more differentiated in this period. The Managing Director continues to be concerned about the way the team functions. The Executive Director Oil and Gas expresses her feelings in private regarding the behaviour of the Managing Director but there is little reflection on how her own behaviour might be contributing to the issues the team faces. The Executive Director Technology attempts to bolster the authority of the Managing Director following the presentation of priorities but others remain silent. It does, however, represent the beginning of a period of reflection during which the senior team members start to ask questions about the team functioning and to an extent their contribution to it. There is little reflection on the importance of this prioritization process in terms of how it may impact on the rest of the company. There is little linking of this process to the broader role of the senior team as providing leadership to the company as a whole.

Below is a summary table showing the descriptive data marked in the text in the strand of data.

Table 11: Strategic Priorities: Summary of Descriptive data

Time line	Strand 3: Strategic Priorities
	Descriptive data
December 2008	Senior team members' reflections on their team performance at the end of the full day meeting are upbeat
December 2008	The team has a lot of energy for collective action directed at the general management population
February 2009	There is a perception that there are too many initiatives and a need to prioritize
February 2009	The Programme Management Group develop a set of criteria for the senior team
February 2009	In my role I experience the formulation of the criteria as an attack on the strategic projects
February 2009	The Programme Management Group assesses its own authority with the senior team
February 2009	Strong challenge to Managing Director's leadership in senior team meeting
17 th February 2009	The senior team assign the task of prioritization back to the Programme Management Group
23 rd February 2009	The Managing Director accepts the proposal that he decides on the prioritization
17 th March 2009	The Managing Director's presentation is not engaged with
17 th March 2009	Team members are frustrated
March - April 2009	The Executive Director Technology attempts to reassert the Managing Director's authority

This awareness of its own functioning forms the main focus of a final strand of data that illustrates the team's concern about shared leadership. The Managing Director's own reflections on his attempts to get the team to lead as a team form an important part of this strand. The title of the strand is derived from language that the senior team itself used to label its own difficulties in functioning as an effective senior team.

Strand 4: Senior team decision-making

March 2009 – October 2009 (8 months)

Introduction

This strand of data represents the culmination of a process that began with the senior team's reflection on its difficulty in setting strategic priorities for 2009, covered in strand 3. The earlier preoccupation with the strategic projects gives way to a realization that all the other shared tasks are also 'delayed'; the removal of the HR Director meant that other targets for aggression had to be found, and the very public failure to agree a set of priorities for 2009 led the team to conclude that the problems lay closer to home. The overall timeline for this strand begins with the middle of the last strand and ends toward the end of the team's working life and my work with the team in late 2009.

The 'beginning' of the strand outlines events from the March 2009 senior team meeting when the new Executive Director Accounting and Finance makes her presence felt through her challenging remarks about the team culture. This highlights issues of decision-making that were to culminate in an off-site one-day meeting for the senior team three months later on 30 June 2009 to reflect on its own functioning. This forms 'the middle' of the data strand presented here. The 'end' of the strand presents data from one-to-one meetings with the Managing Director as he begins to articulate his frustrations in the team, particularly in two Programme Management Group meetings at which finally issues regarding his 'leadership style' are voiced. The data thus cover a period from March 2009 to

October 2009. The language the team used to diagnose the general malaise was 'senior team decision-making' and it thus forms the title of this strand.

The BEGINNING (March 2009)

- Identification of the 'parental culture'

At the senior team meeting on 17 March 2009, three agenda items concerning the role of the senior team were raised. These appeared in the formal minutes as:

- '1. Senior team visibility: how do we behave when we are not in this room?*
- 2. Working more effectively – how do we follow through once we've made decisions in this room?*
- 3. The 'parental culture' – during the Career Paths training the external consultant pointed out that in her view there was a parental culture in the company.'*

The following excerpts from my observational notes of actual discussions on the day illustrate the growing concerns of the team members about their own functioning as a team. The data show some very important aspects of the team's view of the broader company culture, including a reference to the influence of the founders of the current culture. At one point in the meeting the Chief Financial Officer asked the team:

'Does the parental culture come into this room?'

No one responded to this question directly. However it was an invitation to explore the experience of being team members in this senior team. The new Executive Director Accounting and Finance expressed her early impressions of the way the senior team makes decisions. These comments taken from my observational notes on the day are shown below. They illustrate the following two points:

- **There is tension between what decisions must come to the centre or not**
- **The Managing Director expresses his wish that the strategy is 'owned' by the team**

'Linda [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] began to speak about the way that decisions are made. She complains that she has to refer to the centre for so many decisions and it is very slow'.

'Nelson [Executive Director Technology] retorts that "I hate the brutality of Michael Page [an international recruitment company] but the one thing they are is decisive".'

'Faruk [Marketing Director] speaks about how a parental culture isn't necessarily bad – a parent can be 'nurturing'.'

'Linda [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] speaks about there being lot of protocol.'

'We set rules down and there is a reluctance to allow people to get on with their jobs....we had an example last week when we were trying to recruit someone in

Bristol. This is just a fee earner but it shouldn't have taken all of that...I would have been happy for Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] to do the same if you thought it was for the good of your business but balancing that with structure and needing to be consistent without us all having to have a round robin.....do we trust each other? Instead of us all sending round robins..'

Graham [Managing Director] reminded her:

'We were not planning to have procurement in Bristol..it goes against the strategy...we have a big problem about 'exceptions'..people just doing their own thing..we all agree but then someone will forget...'

'Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] said that she didn't feel she needed to get the whole team involved – a round robin – but she did feel she needed to talk to Graham as her boss. Mara said she didn't feel she needed to talk to Graham about the strategy part but about the protocol part. Graham responded by saying that he didn't feel the strategy was his but was the whole team's.'

As discussions about various aspects of organizational culture continued, The Executive Director Legal Services makes a reference to the two founders:

'A lot of this culture was created by Denise and Adam....'

- A reluctance to challenge each other

Following from these exchanges at the beginning of the senior team meeting on 17 March 2009 I recorded in my observational note a summary of the next 30 minutes of discussion – the subject of the conversation was a response to one of my interventions in which I had suggested that team members don't really challenge one another – 'on a scale of 1-10 you probably need to be a 7 and currently you are a 2'. Ironically the discussion itself illustrated the problem:

'There was a long debate about whether the team needed to get up to a 7 as I had challenged. Anne [Executive Director Legal Services] stopped an exchange between the Managing Director and Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] thinking that it was "getting personal". Anne said that she noticed that Graham's body language was changing and it felt like it was getting personal. Both Mara and Anne are able – based on our one-to-one meetings – to see dynamics going on in the team but are afraid of challenging anyone on what they see. The others seem to see nothing..or as Graham says, he only sees it later when he goes back to his office..he can't notice and respond to what he sees at the same time.'

These reflections are part of an intensification of the team's concern about its own functioning, culminating in the decision to hold an off-site meeting.

The MIDDLE (Off-site team meeting 30th June 2009)

Much of the data for this Middle section of the strand are taken from a one-day 'off-site' meeting held specifically to consider the way the team functions. Also included here are data from individual meetings with the Managing Director and his reflections on his experience as the formal leader of this team and his aspiration to share leadership.

At a private meeting with the Managing Director two days before the off-site meeting, he said:

'I know you've been talking about this for years but I am a recent convert. I think we need just to get on with having these discussions and if that means I'll be in the firing line some of the time I am fine with that, because I have got to demonstrate that it's ok to have these discussions'.

Off-site meeting 30th June 2009

The data presented here from the one-day off-site meeting in June 2009 represent a step-change in the way the team reflects on its own experience of collective work and at the same time reveal more about the group dynamics associated with the team's work on what it described as its 'shared accountability' tasks.

The morning was spent with team members raising issues that they felt needed to be addressed. The afternoon consisted of two structured conversations in which

one team member volunteered to select and lead a discussion with a sub-group of the team. While this sub-group discussed the selected issue other team members watched in silence. This 'fishbowl' technique is commonly used in facilitated off-site meetings of this kind.

MORNING SESSION

Taking it in turns, each team member raised an issue that they felt was an important issue related to team decision-making. These form important points of reflection and analysis of their own experience.

- Executive Directors autonomy in decision-making

The Executive Director Accounting and Finance referred back to her presentation to the senior team on 17 March, proposing a re-organization of the Accounting & Finance (A&F) division. The presentation had been controversial because it proposed changes to job titles that had strong implications for other businesses. At the off-site she spoke of her experience which I recorded in my observational notes:

'Linda [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] spoke about it not being clear what decisions you have to 'come to the centre for and which not'. She later spoke about how if she had come to the centre to discuss what she was planning to do but presented it more as 'this is what I am doing' – no discussion. She said, "If you had told me not to do it and it had an impact on the bottom line...and I was afraid that could happen..so that's why I presented it that way..as a done deal"'

I wrote in a note to myself:

'So she is describing some of the thinking that's going on that led her to present her re-organization as if it had not been open to discussion – something like, "I am afraid that you will slow me down so I present my plans as a done deal. When I do this people feel that I am pulling away and are more likely to react negatively – so it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy".'

The Executive Director Technology picked up this theme and spoke about how he felt he had contributed to the difficulties in decision-making

- 'Playing at' decision-making and how this is linked to 'fuzziness' in team level decision-making

Some very important points were made about the team's experience of its own process of decision-making:

'Nelson [Executive Director Technology] spoke to his point about decision making that wasn't really real – a playing at decision making'.

'If you don't really agree with something..and I am guilty of this, I will go along with something even though I have my doubts.'

'Faruk [Marketing Director] spoke about team members 'opting out'.

I spoke about the potential cost of not disclosing what one is thinking about – an apparent consensus which might explain the experience of 'fuzziness' around

decision-making which team members had spoken about. Anne [Executive Director Legal Services] spoke about the impossibility of understanding the formal minutes of the senior team meetings. The extensive minutes often up to 12 pages in length attempt to record the conversations and 'Action points' of the senior team.

'I just can't read them...I can't understand if we've made any decisions or not'

Graham's Personal Assistant then spoke of her difficulty in working out whether a decision had been made and what exactly the team was agreeing to.

'So I just write everything in the hope that you guys will know what you meant.'

- A polarization in approaches to change – 'just do it' versus 'follow up and review'

The Executive Director Oil and Gas then spoke about the expectations around the way new initiatives should be implemented.

'Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] spoke about the failure to do a good review and follow up. This emerged as an important theme of the day – the feeling that change is often implemented with the requirement for 100% compliance and "just do it" approach rather than a pilot – "let's see what we can learn as we try to implement it" approach.'

This was an indirect reference to the project methodology associated with my work – an approach to adaptive work based on ongoing learning while trying to implement. This was contrasted with a more directive ‘just do it’ approach associated with what I called the Managing Director’s ‘absolutist’ language – when he would often use the phrase ‘zero-tolerance’ when referring to an unacceptable degree of deviation from the requirements set for performance in initiatives agreed by the senior team. These were listed on the Gantt chart as shared accountability tasks.

- Collaboration is hard because of ‘silos’ and the structure of the role of Executive Directors

The Executive Director Technology, spoke then about the issue of what he simply called ‘silos’.

‘Nelson [Executive Director Technology] went on to speak about the silo-ed nature of Executive Director work. He also mentioned at this point and several later points the importance of the Executive Director role and how it is defined’.

Both the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director Legal Services spoke about their experience in their respective roles of project sponsor for a strategic project and the Permanent Recruitment Director – a new role with authority to create the ‘Perm’ strategy for the organization. They spoke about their difficulty in taking up their authority – feeling that their roles were not really supported. This is yet another indication that team members did not feel authorized in their roles

when engaged in shared accountability tasks. I wrote in a note to myself on this day:

'When it comes to doing work on behalf of the team, individuals don't feel authorized – emails not answered, silence following questions, low energy in meetings, etc – and of course that would suggest a group dynamic in which no one feels authorized to work.'

- The 'centre' is experienced as harsh

After listening to several accounts of different but related issues I proposed an interpretation that was received with supportive nods. From my observational notes:

'I offered the team an interpretation that was based on their descriptions of the 'zero tolerance' and how implementation is legislated and Linda's description of her presenting her restructuring as a done deal for fear of being told that she couldn't do what she wanted....all this suggests the 'centre' is experienced as harsh. They acknowledged this.'

This interpretation was also related to the way the Managing Director and the Marketing Director were increasingly perceived as a pair within the team.

- A team within a team

In addition to the apparent 'pairing' of the Marketing Director and Managing Director, I commented on the changing role of the Chief Financial Officer and suggested then that there was in fact a team within a team. From my observational notes:

'I then went on to speak about what appeared to me a group dynamic around the three 'old' Executive Directors and the rest of the team. I started by speaking about the role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) – that it seemed to be changing. Graham [Managing Director] confirmed that he has had a discussion with the CFO and agreed that he would take up a bigger role. Nelson responded that he sensed that some decision had been made but that he had not been told. I spoke about feelings of inclusion and exclusion and how these can be powerful in a team if not addressed. I suggested that it sometimes seemed that the three Executive Directors – excluding the newly appointed Executive Director Accounting and Finance – were junior members of the team.'

The Executive Director Technology responded to this:

'I don't necessarily feel like a junior member of the team but I do feel that the three of us could be most easily put upon to be loaded up to do things...it all tends to land on us.'

Anne [Executive Director Legal Services] added, 'I did feel when Luke left (a former Executive Director who was fired) that it was as if the runt of the litter had been fired'. (everyone laughs!). But Anne was deadly serious and reiterated, "That's what went through my mind". '

In a private meeting with the Executive Director Oil and Gas before this off-site meeting, she had described the team using a vivid metaphor of sibling relationships:

'Nelson [Executive Director Technology] is the eldest and can do what he wants...Anne [Executive Director Legal Services] is the favourite youngest child and can sit on daddy's lap and say what she likes..she gets to give feedback in private..and I am the middle child..it doesn't matter how well I do or how hard I try I'll never get daddy's attention.'

This was the first unsolicited reference to sibling dynamics.

THE AFTERNOON SESSION

After lunch the team selected two issues – 'Billing Manager' and 'Workload' that exemplified the kinds of issues raised in the morning session.

Group 1 - 'Billing Manager'

The Chief Financial Officer selected the 'Billing Manager' issue which refers to the senior team meeting on the 17 March at which the Executive Director Accounting

and Finance had presented a new structure for her Accounting & Finance (A&F) division – the most controversial aspect of which was her reformulation of the manager’s role with a new job title ‘Billing Manager’. This constituted a major change with implications across the organization. At the time while there was some discussion there was very little challenge – and this was the Chief Financial Officer’s main concern.

He invited three Executive Directors – Technology, Oil and Gas and Legal Services – to join him for the discussion in the ‘fishbowl’ while the Marketing Director, Managing Director and Executive Director Accounting and Finance watched. By this time, the HR Director, was no longer with the company.

‘Peter [Chief Financial Officer] introduced the issue by saying that Linda’s [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] proposal for the A&F reorganization had implications for the Future Manager project but no one had said anything.’

‘Linda spoke saying that she felt there was an undercurrent of “we should have all been involved with this” – this is everyone’s business. “If I had hesitated though and opened it up for discussion I wonder if I would have done anything by now?”’

‘Peter asked Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] and Nelson [Executive Director Technology] “did anyone else feel this?”’

The silence that followed suggested no one was willing to comment about whether they had or not.

The conversation continued and it became clear that conflict was being managed away from the senior team meetings – ‘off-line’.

- An avoidance of conflict and the expression of strong feelings ‘off-line’

‘Peter [Chief Financial Officer] said he felt it was going to be a car crash. “If there had been a bigger challenge to Linda [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] then maybe we could have done something about it”.’

‘Peter said that he felt that the challenge should have come from operational Executive Directors. But Peter was also challenged by others for not saying anything about the ‘car crash’.

The re-structuring of A&F referred to here as the ‘Billing Manager’ issue had implications for the whole business. The senior team struggled to clarify to what extent an Executive Director could make decisions and to what extent a team discussion was necessary. The Executive Director Legal Services was later to say in private that:

*‘It was clear from the beginning that Linda [Executive Director Accounting and Finance] was going to do what the f*** she wanted so what was the point, Graham [Managing Director] was never going to stop her..’*

In this meeting the dynamic structure of the team was emerging in which the three ‘old’ Executive Directors – Technology, Oil and Gas, and Legal Services – were

feeling put upon and the Managing Director, Marketing Director, and Chief Financial Officer were forming an alliance around a need for more discipline from the Executive Directors. Linda was seen as allied to this camp too as she was a very senior external hire with a recognized status within the industry. The team was increasingly feeling like three junior members and four more senior members.

The second issue selected for work after lunch was the issue of how much Executive Directors and the other managers were being asked to do.

Group 2 - 'Workload'

The second 'fishbowl' of the afternoon – in which some members talk while others observe – was in my own words on the day:

'A critical discussion which eventually expanded out into a full group discussion.'

- Conflict between sub-groups of the senior team

The emergence of a dynamic between the three 'junior' Executive Directors and the others became clearer. The team members discussing the workload issue were three Executive Directors – Accounting and Finance, Oil and Gas, and Legal Services – together with the Marketing Director. The Executive Director Technology, the Chief Financial Officer and Managing Director were observers. I will summarize the main points here. From my observational notes:

'Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] started by saying that she felt that at the moment it felt like execution is about being good or bad, but not about learning and review. "It's 100% compliance or not".'

The Marketing Director argued forcefully that decisions on what to do and what not to do had to be made. The 'business' was saying that they had too much to do and some priorities had to be decided.

'We have to react to what the business is telling us but there is no clarity on our part.'

The Executive Director Oil and Gas then spoke about the 'zero tolerance' language that the Managing Director uses. The Marketing Director reacted by saying he had never heard the term. The phrase was recorded in the formal minutes of several senior team meetings as well as in my own notes. When she heard the Marketing Director say this Executive Director Oil and Gas responded angrily:

'I don't believe you. How can you say that!?''

'Anne [Executive Director Legal Services] joins Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] in this and it feels like there are two pairs – Mara and Anne, and Faruk and Linda – it felt that way from early on. Linda comments that she doesn't experience the Marketing Director in that way at all and speaks supportively of Faruk and how they collaborate together. The Chief Financial Officer as an observer comes in to say that

he feels Mara is somehow speaking to Graham [Managing Director] through Faruk. This is excellent.'

- The idea that the Managing Director is being addressed indirectly

This is the first time that it has been observed that when team members speak to one another they may in fact be saying something about the formal leader – the Managing Director.

'At one point Graham [Managing Director] expresses strongly his feeling that he's happy that the message is out there that there should be zero tolerance. He said he was concerned that people aren't getting it but if it's the case that people really are then that's really good!! He was so effusive about this that it was commented on by team members in the later review. The Chief Financial Officer said he was really pleased to see the Managing Director do that – and several people nodded.'

- A wish for strong leadership

My sense was that despite a day of fractious interactions, including resentment about the use of language such as 'zero-tolerance', the team seemed relieved to hear the Managing Director raise his voice in defense of this stance. It felt as if there was a strong need for him to take up his role with some authority.

The day ended with some reflections. It was thought to be a very good day but many people spoke of feeling exhausted and a bit 'bruised'.

The END (July-October 2009)

While the off-site meeting on 30 June 2009 was the first time that the senior team expressed recognition of its own part in the problems of implementation, worse was to come in terms of this team paralysis. The final part of this strand draws on data from one-to-one meetings with the Managing Director in July as well as two of the final Programme Management Groups at which there was a discussion of the Manager Director's leadership style. A much more direct and challenging way of speaking to one another emerges.

In July, two weeks after the off-site meeting, the Managing Director was keen to speak to me. He was concerned that the benefits of the day would be lost. He lamented his efforts with the senior team:

'Giving the responsibility to others to make X happen or to reach a collective decision. I've been to all the seminars – they all say the same thing – that change doesn't succeed because of a failure to engage the people. So I have done everything I can to get that team of people engaged.'

He was tired of trying to work in such a way that the team would take up the leadership of the company with him. He recognized a pattern in which he was being pulled by the team into being more authoritarian.

'I am sick of it happening. Theoretically I could be on their backs all the time. I didn't want to answer your question about implementation because I am embarrassed to answer your question. There are so many examples of us not doing what we say we'll do'.

In late September 2009 and early October 2009 two Programme Management Group meetings typify the experience of team members at this time as they try to work collectively. The Executive Director Oil and Gas also attended these meetings along with the permanent members, including me. The dynamic between the 'junior' Executive Directors – Technology, Oil and Gas, and Legal Services – and the Marketing Director and Managing Director manifest at the off-site meeting was still apparent.

Programme Management Group 28 September 2008

Of 16 shared accountability tasks on the Programme Management Group Gantt chart, 14 were marked 'delayed'. The Executive Director Technology and the Executive Director Oil and Gas suggested that the way to deal with the poor decision-making was to bring in more Project Management methods.

From my meeting notes:

'Faruk [Marketing Director] came in strongly to disagree with the need for Project Management. "Project Management can only look at the present situation...it's not going to deal with this. They only use the data you give them".'

- Acknowledgement of possible non-rational group processes

The Marketing Director went on to suggest that the issue was not a lack of 'tools'.

'Faruk got red-faced and was really quite angry..and said more than once "I disagree...it is delay for delay's sake...I know it's controversial but that's what I think it is".'

The discussion finally became a more direct discussion of the Managing Director's leadership style. At one point the Managing Director enquires directly for the first time about how others experience his requests that things get done. As shown below, the discussion begins with a discussion of how well the senior team is able to make decisions and implement them. From my observational notes:

'As a business our execution is not good..' (Executive Director Technology)

'We are talking about failure...but we are not failing..' (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

'Any item with shared accountability falls through the cracks..' (Marketing Director)

I intervene to make a point that many of these comments address the Managing Director's leadership style. This was taken up by team members:

'We don't want an autocrat..but we don't want to be micro-managed...' (Executive Director Technology)

'I am tired of going into meetings when things aren't being done..' (Managing Director)

'We are not good at review and monitoring' (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

'But do you think we don't hit deadlines?'(Executive Director Technology)

'I feel that none of it is being done..' (Managing Director)

'I feel we beat ourselves up (a lot of talk about the zero tolerance comments from the Managing Director)' (Executive Director Technology)

'Can you remember ourselves as beating ourselves up?..I don't think we beat ourselves up..' (Managing Director)

'I question that...' (Executive Director Oil and Gas)

Then the Managing Director offers an example and asks a question regarding how he is experienced in his role:

'I have a question on the strategic priorities...and how you take this on board..one of the things we agreed was on compliance. And off we go..and all our candidates will be involved in call cycles. My experience of that...should we have taken more time to review that and done it better somehow but the reality is half way through the year we weren't on call cycles. We weren't doing what we said we would. What were people thinking.. do you think I am obsessing about this and I am on my high horse or can you be open enough to say what you really think?

In my observational notes at the time I wrote about how impressed I was about the degree of challenge that team members were willing to offer one another. And critically the Managing Director was challenging them to be honest about how they experienced him.

- Managing Director enquires into how team members experience his request for things to be done

I wrote in my notes:

'This seemed like a break-through meeting – at last they are beginning to talk about what's really getting in the way'.

The Programme Management Group meeting the following week was a continuation of the conversation. The group felt tentative and unsteady with this new way of interacting. Both the Executive Director Technology and Executive Director Oil and Gas expressed regret and concern about the meeting of the week before – as if they had done something wrong.

- Difficulty acknowledging the forward steps

From my notes:

'Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] apologised for being 'clumsy'. "I had a follow-up meeting with the Managing Director last week and I said that I felt I had been clumsy and could have done it better".'

'Nelson [Executive Director Technology] talked about how he reflected after the meeting and said that he felt he has a tendency to emphasise the positive and how everything on the surface is nice and tend to paper over the cracks.'

The discomfort of having conflicts has been a constant throughout the life of this team. The Marketing Director, when asked said that he felt argument was important and that last week's meeting had been a useful one.

What is important from this meeting is that the Managing Director is able to demonstrate a way of describing his own experience that acknowledges his own role in the problems that are occurring. The two Executive Directors struggle to reciprocate. At one point in the meeting the Managing Director describes the way in which he feels pulled into the role of being an authoritarian leader. He acknowledges that he has a tendency to do this. From my notes to the meeting:

'Graham [Managing Director] said that he doesn't want to have a situation where he is just creating more and more measures and controls and having to have more and

more meetings with Mara [Executive Director Oil and Gas] because he doesn't trust that things are being done. "I can end up doing that but it's not what I want".'

After some further examples, the Executive Director Oil and Gas claims that nothing that is happening is anything to do with her. I wrote in my observational notes:

'What I didn't realise is that you were setting that deadline..so I had a discussion about it with my people but... (a detailed description of what she did). It is delivered nonchalantly as if "I didn't do anything wrong!"'

'I don't have any visibility on what's going on.. and you go round the side of what it is we have agreed to do whatever...and people say it was never going to get done..'
(Managing Director)

'Mara says something about it might happen a bit somewhere but not her area of course!'

The Managing Director responded quickly with:

'No! I am telling you..it happens!'

I intervened at this point in the meeting and explained that if team members are able to explore how they might be contributing to the problems the team has, then

it would be a big step forward – I pointed out that the Managing Director had demonstrated that in this meeting. He tried to reassure the Programme Management Group:

'I have said in the past..that we know it starts here with us..let's not be afraid of getting this stuff out on the table. Let's leave at the door the fact that we are good at our jobs..and none of what is said has implied that no one is good at their jobs. Lots of things we can do to make ourselves better as a team'.

- The Managing Director finishes the meeting with a call for leadership from all team members

'The business needs us to do more here and through your leadership we can get there..'

This strand ends with this declaration of the Managing Director's wish that the whole team provides leadership to the organization. Finally the following two short sections address explanatory data analysis which relates to my developing working hypotheses from a systems psychodynamic perspective.

The group dynamics of working together – link to concepts

The difficulty in challenging one another in the course of ordinary senior teamwork confounds the team's capacity to decide on anything. In order to manage anxieties induced by working on the list of shared accountability tasks, a

number of social defenses emerge (see outline on p.128). Instead of dealing with the continual learning entailed in collective adaptive work, the Managing Director and Marketing Director engage in categorical 'zero tolerance' language as if solutions can be legislated. In the absence of effective debate, sub-groups emerge which represent rather than work through the issues – one sub-group of 'junior' Executive Directors lined against a sub-group who claim that the number of 'delayed' items on the list of shared accountability tasks is wilful. Basic-assumption dependency behaviour manifests itself in the celebration of the Managing Director's assertion of his right to zero tolerance language. The wish for the Managing Director to take up his role in a more traditional way reflects feelings of dependency in relation to the demands of the collective adaptive work represented by the items on the Gantt chart.

Team members' perceptions of their experience

Team members' perceptions of their experience become sharply differentiated in this strand of data. In particular the Managing Director articulates his own experience of feeling a pull from the team to take up his leadership in a particular way. He is also able to say that he is attracted to some aspects of being more directive. He is thus able to articulate the ways in which his own behaviour is contributing to the problems that he sees. The Executive Director Accounting and Finance also articulates how she acts to pre-empt what she imagines will be a team decision-making process that will prevent her from acting freely. The team is less likely to scapegoat externally at this point since it seems more reflective and acutely aware of its own shortcomings in relation to its tasks. At this time the team

is able to relate clearly its own functioning to its capacity to do its adaptive work. This is understood differently but there seems little doubt that team members' perception of their performance, relative to their adaptive challenges, is heightened and proves a constant source of frustration.

This concludes the fourth and final strand of data that I am presenting as illustrative and representative of the group dynamics that are manifest in the team while attempting to engage in a set of shared leadership tasks. The descriptive data points for this fourth strand are summarized in the table below.

Table 12: Senior team decision-making: Summary of Descriptive data

Strand 4: Time line	Senior team decision-making
	Descriptive data
March 2009	Identification of the 'parental culture'
March 2009	Tension between what decisions must come to the centre or not
March 2009	The Managing Director expresses his wish that the strategy is 'owned' by the team
March 2009	A reluctance to challenge each other
March - June 2009	Executive Directors' autonomy in decision-making
June 2009	A polarization in approaches to change – 'just do it' versus 'follow up and review'
June 2009	A team within a team
June 2009	An avoidance of conflict and the expression of strong feelings 'off-line'
June 2009	Conflict between sub-groups of the senior team
June 2009	The idea that the Managing Director is being addressed indirectly
June 2009	A wish for strong leadership
September 2009	Acknowledgement of possible non-rational group processes
September 2009	Managing Director enquiries into how team members experience his request for things to be done
October 2009	Difficulty acknowledging the forward steps
October 2009	The Managing Director finishes the meeting with a call for leadership from all team members

Chapter 6

INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS

Interpretive Analysis

Introduction

The previous chapter presented four strands of descriptive data in which the exposition remained as close as possible to the data in order to disclose as clearly as possible how I got from the experience of working with the team to data synthesis and description as a first round of analysis using a clinical fieldwork approach in the systems psychodynamic tradition.

In addition these four strands were supplemented by some explanatory data analysis that linked the descriptive data to systems psychodynamic concepts described in chapter three, such as basic-assumption behaviour, anxiety, role, boundary, splitting and projection, (see pages 113-129). These explanatory analyses do not answer why a particular dynamic or pattern of systemic affect may be present but represent the types of concepts to which I associated in the course of my data collection. If it seems for example, that an individual is being scapegoated or idealized at a particular time, it is often possible to identify that such a dynamic is going on but why it is going on is often not immediately clear. This chapter presents a more detailed interpretive analysis that while still remaining close to the descriptive data and explanatory analysis presents a number of more fully articulated interpretive working hypotheses for each strand. The analysis presented in this chapter will not simply say, 'this is an example of projection' or 'this is an example of scapegoating'. These terms are starting points for interpretive analysis although sufficient for provisional explanatory analyses. These terms will be used as a conceptual framework from which to develop a set of

higher order concepts or ‘working hypotheses’ that offer plausible but provisional explanations as to why things are happening as well as how they support or undermine attempts to implement shared leadership in the face of adaptive challenges. Knowledge in this domain is always provisional rather than probabilistic and is usually offered to a client system for consideration and further refinement. These working hypotheses are developed here as the basis of a theoretical contribution to the field of shared leadership in order to address a gap in the literature. One main research question is articulated:

How can the study of an attempt to implement shared leadership in an executive team, using a systems psychodynamic perspective, contribute to our understanding of leadership responses to adaptive challenges?

This question is operationalized into two questions:

RQ1. How does an attempt to implement shared leadership affect the group dynamics within a senior team?

RQ2. How do team members relate these experiences to their perception of the tasks that the senior team is charged with achieving?

The interpretive level of data analysis presented here represents a deepening of the data analysis by making links to the whole strand rather than a particular meeting or incident. These analyses were created from an iterative process and continuous interaction with the data in the process of synthesising the data

described in chapter four and of interaction with the senior team as described in the data strands presented. The longitudinal nature of the data collection process allowed for early hypotheses to mature as the team's experience of their own work on these shared accountability tasks developed. This allows for more comprehensive hypotheses to be made which also link to psychodynamic theory to form a set of 'working hypotheses' (see description on pp.145-146). Several points are made for each strand thus directly addressing the two operationalized research questions one regarding the group dynamics that ensue when there is an attempt to implement shared leadership and the second related to the perceptions of team members' efforts to work together on an agreed set of shared leadership tasks. The second research question is addressed more explicitly in the data from the final strand when the team held an off-site meeting at which they considered the link between their own behaviour and the outcomes of their work.

To the interpretive analysis of each strand I will add additional data – mostly related to the case description (see appendix 1) and then synthesize these into one final analysis and the articulation of a set of higher order meta-level statements that address the two operationalized research questions and by implication the main research question.

The interpretive data analysis for each strand begins with a summary of the strand and a list of the key data points made.

Strand 1: Strategy Projects

This first strand of descriptive data presented in the previous chapter outlined the senior team activities related to the articulation of a set of five strategic projects.

These projects were to be led by a project sponsor from the senior team but overall accountability for their success was shared. These five projects related to adaptive challenges for which no technical solution was readily apparent.

Undertaking a parallel stream of strategic work shortly after embarking on the strategic project work and involving 23 of the next level managers proved problematic. Ultimately the projects remained a constant focus of senior team criticism though none of the projects was ever abandoned. A summary of the main points of the descriptive data is presented below. However, the interpretive data analysis that follows is not only based on these points; appropriate data will be used that may refer to aspects of the organization outlined in the description of the company and given in the appendix.

Descriptive data summary

- Project Briefs written and approved by senior team but not referred to again
- Senior team engages in two separate streams of strategic work
- Tension between project sponsor and Marketing Director
- Tension between New Talent and Your Career project sponsors
- Conflict develops between senior team and projects
- Data presented illustrates competition between Executive Directors

- Projects are the only agenda item for the Programme Management Group meetings
- Projects are described as 'tail wagging the dog'
- Repetition of the same diagnostic

An interpretive analysis of the strategic projects strand

The five 'strategic projects' demanded a considerable amount of senior team time and the time of their first reports – 23 in all, excluding senior team members.

Project meetings were weekly and usually of 2-3 hours in length. Then the senior team embarked on a second strategic stream of work with similar implications in terms of senior management time. Both constituted attempts at shared leadership to enable adaptive work. Both generated a large number of initiatives that came to be managed by the Programme Management Group as tasks for which there was shared accountability. There are several related points here, all unconscious group level strategies (see outline of social defenses on p. 128) to regulate anxiety within the senior team. The headings represent interpretive data analysis in which data and systems psychodynamic theory are linked. The final section will provide a synthesis of these analyses and identify key findings of this study. An interpretive analysis of this first strand is built on seven related points:

(1) The failure to integrate the two strands of work was an avoidance of leadership at the boundary of the organization

All proposals to integrate the work on the strategic projects with the work on the 'strategic triangle' were not taken up. At the organizational level leadership is a boundary managing function – as outlined earlier on p.127 - between the external environment and the internal world of the organization (Obholzer 2001, Hirschhorn 1999, Miller 1997). During times of change and transition it is essential that leadership functions to ensure that the exchange of information, knowledge, resources and skills across the boundary between the organization and the environment is sufficient for the organization to survive and thrive. Too much and the organization is overwhelmed by data, too little and the organization is in danger of being unable to adapt to the environment. Boundaries – how they are designed, managed, and imagined are thus an important aspect of containment (Winnicott, 1965) and correspond to Heifetz and Laurie's more colloquial notion of the 'holding environment', (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997, p.127). The projects were mainly focussed on internal processes. The strategic work led by the Marketing Director was focussed on the external world. It was necessary for effective leadership at the boundary of the organization that these two be integrated – that the external world and internal realities of organizational life inform one another.

(2) Framing the issue as a choice – projects *or* strategic work – was a defense against the anxieties of learning together

Learning is central to adaptive work (Heifetz and Laurie 1999, 1997) and was continually resisted - that the senior team could learn that its project focus was too internal and should be informed by more inputs from the environment was not

possible. The notion of 'either A or B' instead of 'A and B' is a common organizational defense routine. Framed as a choice, it presents the team with something more manageable rather than the more disturbing notion of having to collaborate - to integrate the projects with the other strategic work - that exposes group members to each other in new and potentially threatening ways. Transforming this task into a managerial choice - and deciding it was a clear one - helped reduce the anxieties posed by the externally driven threat of failing performance. It gave team members the illusion of control as a defense against the anxieties of not being able to control or fully know the external environment.

(3) The demands of shared leadership were substituted by a more traditional managerial issue

The outcome of the first two points- a refusal to integrate and the framing of a choice led to competition for the time of managers. Thus the challenge of creatively exploring adaptive strategies to respond to shifting external realities was commuted to a problem of resource constraint. Instead of directing energy to the creative task of integration, learning and experimentation - essential for adaptive work - energy was focussed on reducing the demands that the projects placed on managers' time. A more managerial issue of resource allocation created and effectively substituted for the shared leadership task of collaboratively integrating related streams of strategic and adaptive work.

(4) Framing the issue as one of resource constraint made conflict inevitable

To ensure that the choice did not itself provoke anxiety, it had to be a 'clear' one – bad projects versus good strategic work. Basic assumption 'fight-flight' behaviour (Bion 1961) was mobilized around a fictitious choice and an associated resource constraint that could have been managed through integration. The focus of this group level projective process was the projects and by association with me, as if I were the project manager. In my role as consultant I felt hostility to my presence which felt systemic rather than personal in nature. In psychoanalytic terms I felt a strong counter-transference (see outline on p.121) to the team having to manage my own aggression at finding my attempts to get the team to work frustrated (White, 2001). I felt excluded and constantly experienced the projects as a subject of critical managerial scrutiny – they were slow, poorly managed, undisciplined, unaccountable, unrealistic, and not connected to the challenges of the market place. In other words all the concerns that were later to emerge as the senior team reflected on its functioning, were projected onto the strategic projects.

(5) Construing the projects as external to the senior team helped alleviate anxiety arising from linking the slow projects to the senior team's functioning

The senior team constantly alluded to the projects as if they were outside the room. Each project had a project sponsor who was a senior team member. At no time did one team member confront another team member about the progress of their project. Instead, the projects were heralded as wilful and a case of the 'tail

wagging the dog'. Basic assumption 'fight-flight' behaviour is a group level process by which anxiety is managed by projecting aggression onto an idea, person, or group as if it were an enemy against which the team must protect itself. It provides a false and fragile form of apparent consensus. I was an easier target for aggression than a colleague and so the externalization of aggression as a means of reducing the awareness of any potential conflicts between team members was routinely established. By not accepting that project sponsors were also senior team members, protected team members from having to make the obvious link between the effectiveness of the projects and the effectiveness of the senior team. While I made this link on several occasions, it was rarely taken up.

(6) Team members engaged in the repression of what they knew regarding their own competition with each other

The data from interviews carried out by the New Talent project team members exposed competition between managers in different divisions. The 'cherry-picking' of CVs by the Executive Directors themselves – all team senior team members – was also known. The creation of an internal structure called internal recruitment in an organization specializing in recruitment set the scene for more basic assumption behaviour. My interpretation that they had created this department as a way to structurally distance themselves from having to confront their competition with one another was grudgingly accepted after the evidence was overwhelming.

(7) By ignoring the Project Brief documents senior team members withdrew from their roles as senior team members

Project Briefs outlined measurable outcomes for each project. That these were never referred to again at a team level suggests a reluctance to take up the role of sponsor and the accountability that goes with it. In this case it is the willingness to be held accountable by other team members for a task that involves processes that run across the organization and not simply divisional but were adaptive in nature. These roles - i.e. project sponsor, - was clearly related to a task for which shared leadership was required. By rejecting the Project Briefs sponsors shrank from the task and the role related to it. This is another aspect of how boundaries are thought of psychodynamically; boundaries are not only real but also imagined (Hirschhorn, 1990, p.37). For example, a boundary was imagined between the projects and the senior team. The projects were 'out there' and out of control. Psychological boundaries like this represent distortions of reality and serve the purpose of reducing anxiety. Anxiety also leads individuals and groups to withdraw from the boundaries of a role. Senior team members in their role as leaders of the organization not just their own areas as described in their original statement of core purpose are required by their roles to hold each other accountable for tasks for which shared accountability has been agreed. Since at no time were project sponsors challenged, this suggests that team members and project sponsors withdrew from their roles. I shall discuss the consequences of this more in the final synthesis.

Having outlined an interpretive analysis of the strategic project strand of the data I will now consider the Career Paths strand. Some aspects of the analysis will be similar – this is expected since ultimately this was one team working on related tasks and the group dynamics are similarly related. However there are other aspects of the group dynamics of this strand that give additional insight into what may have been going on at an unconscious level within the group that meant that this shared leadership task was not fulfilled and adaptive work not done.

Strand 2: Career Paths

As one of the five strategic projects, this strand began with the presentation of the project team and the selection of career paths as a central focus for a company wide deployment to address the adaptive challenge of high turnover of managers. The beginning of the strand describes the early conflicts between the project team and the senior team as well as between the HR Director and other project sponsors. The middle of the strand describes the senior team's avoidance of speaking openly about their misgivings about the proposed training programme. The strand ends with the HR Director being asked to leave the company, and the senior team reflecting on the positive feedback the training received from the management population. As with the previous strand, this interpretive analysis starts with the main items from the descriptive level data from the last chapter. The interpretive analysis will be based on this data but will be supplemented where necessary.

Descriptive data summary

- The proposed implementation of career paths requires Executive Directors to let go of talented individuals
- Tension emerges between time spent on project and other emerging strategic work
- Resistance to career paths is rationalized
- Anger flares up 'off-line'
- An all or nothing proposal from the project sponsor – the HR Director
- A split between what is said in private and what is declared in public

- The design proposed by the HR Director is for a cultural change programme and is thus potentially provocative
- The wider management population responds well to the two-day training event
- 360 feedback method is used to give the HR Director very negative feedback
- Senior team publicly support Career Paths but privately plan to minimize their participation
- Senior team members doubt the validity of the positive feedback about the career paths training event
- Discussion about the HR Director's leaving is avoided

An interpretive analysis of the Career Paths strand

The firing of the HR Director was an important moment in the life of the senior team. As a senior and respected member of the Human Resources professional community with an impressive international career with globally recognized companies his departure is unlikely to be the result simply of personal incompetence. Career paths are a commonly used HR process designed to address retention rates, an issue identified by the senior team in 2006 as a serious adaptive issue for the organisation. How can a system psychodynamic perspective on this strand of data provide insight into why this attempt at shared leadership was not successfully implemented? The interpretive analysis covers eight related points:

(1) Career paths imply Executive Directors should assess each other's employees and their own recruitment decisions and thus raised anxiety

Firstly, career paths represent the requirement that senior team members collaborate in an assessment of all managers – even those reporting to other team members and the willingness to propose a career move deemed developmental for the individual and the medium or longer term benefit of the organisation. This indirectly placed individual managerial appointments by Executive Directors under the scrutiny and judgment of colleagues. Comments were often made off-line about particular managers. The vociferous attack on the manager of the internal recruitment department reporting into the HR Director is a case in point. This process requires that Executive Directors accept the authority of other colleagues to evaluate and assess hires that they had made and as such raised anxiety.

(2) Career paths made Executive Directors more dependent at a difficult time

The implementation of career paths implies a willingness to 'give' a potentially high performing manager to another Executive Director who may be able to offer something not currently available in their division. Dependency was increased since only if everybody were willing to do this would the 'losses' and 'gains' of talented staff even out. Raising the spectre of dependency on each other, senior team members went to considerable lengths to undermine the implementation of career paths.

This was particularly the case since at this time Executive Directors were under considerable pressure in terms of performance – the company was not doing well in 2008-2009 due in part to the financial crisis. However, the *relative* performance of Recco to other recruitment companies was poor.

Critically much of the sales volume is based on personal connections between managers and clients. This is a widespread problem in the recruitment industry - when a manager leaves he or she takes their clients with them. This is why retention was such an urgent issue generating a lot of anxiety among Executive Directors. This is also why career paths were such a threat to them.

(3) Career paths occurring at a time of rapid growth for the organisation challenged the competence of the Executive Directors

As the company grew so it needed to develop complex structures to ensure the systematic sharing of knowledge regarding candidates and clients – something that had hitherto been achieved informally. Technology that facilitated advanced database management and the logging and storage of client and candidate information was essential. So too was the co-ordination of back office payment functions with front office sales as well as co-ordination of activity across sectors to ensure that cross-selling opportunities are harnessed. This would require new roles other than simple sales oriented roles and more *complex* roles that encompass a wider range of tasks.

The implementation of career paths at this time demanded an expanded view of the role of managers and their wider potential role in the organization as a whole. The company was growing and needed to develop organizational processes commensurate with its size and the challenge to do this provoked anxiety within senior team members particularly the Executive Directors accustomed to think of managers only as *sales* managers.

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(4) The appointment of an HR Director was a threat to Executive Directors autonomy and sense of competence

Both the Marketing and HR functions were tasked with creating processes that by definition ran across the company and were to be adhered to by all. Thus creation of HR processes had implications for the role of Executive Directors. They were no longer simply expected to run their respective businesses by maximizing sales but to see themselves as responsible for the company as a whole. Basic assumption 'fight-flight' behaviour – the HR Director and career paths were to be attacked as if they were a threat - was mobilized around the issue of career paths in denial of feelings of vulnerability and dependency. If they could prove the HR Director was incompetent then they could also comfort themselves with the fantasy that they could manage the HR function as before. This attack thus represented a denial of reality since team members openly acknowledged that support functions were required due to the company's rapid growth.

It was not only the organizational issues that HR was to address that posed a threat to the Executive Directors. It was also aspects of who the new Director was - he was after all hired from outside partly because he was different. He was 15 years older than the Executive Directors – and by implication the eldest person in the company by far. In contrast he had a career spanning many industries while the Executive Directors and the Managing Director had only worked in the recruitment industry and only worked in Recco.

(5) The team justifies its behaviour through rationalisation

The suggestion that career paths could only be implemented when business models were implemented was a way to legitimize resistance to career paths and provide a rationalization to mask the more complex group dynamic related to anxiety. Even when the wider management population said they had valued the training and looked forward to implementing it with their people, the senior team rationalized this away by denigrating the managers for their 'selfishness'. This enactment of the 'parental culture' served an important function in so much as it maintained a fiction that the senior team were constantly challenged to manage an immature management population. Such contempt also justified the behaviour of the Managing Director and other senior team members who despite a period of cost-cutting allowed more than 60 managers to travel to attend a two- day training course at a London hotel despite the widely held belief in the senior team that the training was unnecessary and that career paths would not achieve their stated aims. They also suggested that they spend a few hours at the beginning of the career path training day doing other things as a team.

The rationalization of such actions protected the senior team from feelings of impotency related to their incapacity to prevent the career paths training from taking place or from mobilizing the necessary aggression to challenge the HR Director in a straightforward way.

(6) A procedure is created as a substitute for directly engaging one another

In lieu of being able to confront a colleague in their roles as senior team members they created a formal procedure – a feedback method – to engineer exclusively bad

feedback for one member. Organisational members often fear the consequences of their own aggression (Hirschhorn, 1990) and will substitute procedure for straightforward expressions of aggression. A company may have a benign informal collegial culture but the formal HR led processes such as appraisals, or bonus schemes, or benefit packages, may carry the more regressive psychic material where it is discharged within particular settings and within particular processes. In selecting the Executive Director Accounting and Finance only two months into her new role with the company as the one to collect and deliver the HR Director's 'horrendous' feedback, the old guard were able to distance themselves from their own aggression.

(7) Adaptive learning was avoided by construing behaviour as a function of person rather than role

There was no hint that team members including the HR Director might learn something about its relationship to Human Resources or to the newly appointed support functions in general. This suggests that senior team members struggled with the notion of role being separate from the person. In this world, the HR Director's behaviour reflected only his personality and his individual skills thus giving him personal feedback was the appropriate response. The psychodynamic concept of role (Lawrence, 1979) includes the idea that a person's behaviour might be symbolic or representative of something else. A struggling IT director might be struggling not only because of who they are but because of the role they hold and how it is perceived in the organisation. If the organisation 'needs' to scapegoat IT then the IT director's experience is likely to reflect this. The other critical aspect of

role is that the role will have an associated authorisation – both formal and informal – and if that role is associated with membership of a group such as a senior team or Programme Management Group then that authority will be constrained by membership of that group. On a 2006 slide on the second time the team met, the wish for ‘cabinet responsibility’ describes exactly the process whereby team members agree to keep the ‘party line’ once it is agreed. Team members were unable to conceive of themselves as role holders that would be subject to powerful projective and irrational forces and that behaviour would reflect that accordingly. Instead, the team members were acting as if they were still a small group of consultants working around a few tables all knowing each other’s clients and candidates and with little need to explore or understand authority, role, boundaries or group dynamics.

(8) Intellectualisation as a defence against feelings related to the firing of the HR director

The HR Director, the eldest member of the company, a new hire, a support function director was driven out of the company and any guilt suppressed as suggested through the intellectualisation of the closing meeting which avoided the question of the HR Director’s contribution to the organisation. The purpose of the agenda item was to consider what should happen to the project since it no longer had a sponsor. The conversation that ensued did not address this issue directly. I joined this conversation – some 45 minutes of discussion about the possible meaning of ‘development’. It was only at the end of it that I felt that we had strayed so far from

the agenda item related to what would happen to the project and project team following the HR Director's departure from the company.

The next strand represents the beginning of a period when the team began to question its own functioning rather than continually regulating its systemic affect by externalizing it through aggression onto project groups or specific individuals. As a result the strand also includes more data about how team members experienced the Managing Director's attempts to implement shared leadership to address adaptive challenges.

Strand 3: Strategic Priorities

This strand starts with the closing hour of a senior team meeting in December 2008 that was to prove apocryphal. The level of enthusiasm in the room as the team members joined one another in proposing ways of galvanising the broader management population in a 'call to arms' was palpable. Their self-appraisal of the day was upbeat. In my consulting role I was also swept up into the positive team energy and congratulated them. Yet none of these 2009 priorities were subsequently taken up by the organization and this did not become apparent until 6 months later. In the meantime despite having articulated a set of priorities for the managers the senior team reflected that as a team they were trying to manage too many shared accountability initiatives and something had to be done to prioritize them – including simply not doing some of them. Time is invested in devising an elaborate process. In this case to design and implement a process that would allow priorities to be identified. In so doing the Managing Director was left feeling that he had been set up. A summary of the main data points from this strand is shown below.

Descriptive data summary

- Senior team member's reflections on their team performance at the end of the full day meeting are upbeat
- The team has a lot of energy for collective action directed at the general management population

- There is a perception that there are too many initiatives and a need to prioritize
- The Programme Management Group develop a set of criteria for the senior team
- In my role I experience the formulation of the criteria as an attack on the strategic projects
- The Programme Management Group assesses it's own authority with the senior team
- Strong challenge to Managing Director's leadership in senior team meeting
- The senior team assign the task of prioritization back to the Programme Management Group
- The Managing Director accepts the proposal that he decides on the prioritization
- The Managing Director's presentation is not engaged with
- Team members are frustrated
- The Executive Director Technology attempts to reassert the Managing Director's authority

An interpretive analysis of the Strategic Priorities strand

This strand starts with the closing hour of a senior team meeting in December 2008 that was to prove apocryphal. The level of enthusiasm in the room as the team members joined one another in proposing ways of galvanising the broader management population in a 'call to arms' was palpable. Their self-appraisal of the day was upbeat. In my consulting role I was also swept up into the positive team energy and congratulated them. Yet none of these 2009 priorities were subsequently taken up by the organization and this did not become apparent until

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(1) Team members join around a fantasy of managerial control as a defense against feelings of dependency

Psychodynamically moments when a team seems to join energetically around an issue begs the question as to what they are joining around? In this case, the team became energised when discussing how they would shake up the management population. Throughout my time working with the Managing Director and subsequently the senior team the wider management population was seen as immature at best and wilfully neglectful at worst. Non-compliance with operational standards was a major theme and one project – the Compliance project was dedicated to addressing the issue of non-compliance in processes related to the management of candidates.

By taking up their role as ‘managing the managers’ senior team members could distance themselves from feelings of dependency. This dependency was based on the way in which the success of the senior team depended on the performance of

the managers in driving their sales teams – particularly as client relationships were based on personal relationships with managers. This subtle prioritization of one aspect of their role at the expense of another gave the senior team a sense of control. Discussing and developing methods of reproaching managers allows Executive Directors as well as functional directors to experience their own agency and potency.

(2) By perceiving the managers as ‘children’ to be disciplined senior team members undermined their own capacity to work strategically

The relationship between the senior team and the wider management population illustrates the ways in which internal role relations in organizations are not simply a function of rational divisions of labour and formal authority. The ‘parental’ relationship between the senior team and the managers allowed for the containment of anxieties associated with contingencies driven by rapidly shifting external conditions that the senior team could not control. Such unconscious role relations have the potential to be functional if it allows for productive work to be done (Krantz, 2001). Unfortunately by treating the managers as immature, the senior team made it less likely that managers would participate in the strategic debates related to the future of the company. By so doing the senior team members undermined their own roles as leaders of the organisation. Part of the role of senior managers is to identify the primary risk (Hirschhorn, 1999) they face by choosing to take the organization in one direction as opposed to another. Senior team members must move toward their anxieties associated with strategic choices; however unconsciously by continuing to perceive the management

population as requiring constant cajoling they undermined this possibility. They thus retreated from the boundaries of their role – that task boundary where organisation meets the environment and which requires senior team members to create an organisation on the inside able to engage the world on the outside for the formulation and commitment to strategies and a vision.

(3) A parallel process between the Programme Management Group and the senior team undermined the possibility for containment

Individuals at work protect themselves from unmanageable anxiety by deploying a set of social defenses. Social defenses can provide sufficient containment – described earlier on p.117 - for anxiety that allows productive work to be done (Hirschhorn, 1990). The process for prioritizing the shared accountability tasks that were filling up the Gantt chart used by the Programme Management Group, could have provided such containment and allowed the senior team to have engaged with each others differences of opinion and led to a creative outcome. This did not happen – the senior team sent the prioritization process back to the Programme Management Group where it was handed back to the Managing Director. Why?

One important reason is suggested by the experience of the members of the Programme Management Group – of which the Managing Director was the head. Members felt they struggled with their authority from the beginning. The ‘PMG report’ item on the senior team agenda was frequently experienced as difficult, with the Executive Director Technology on more than one occasion saying after his presentation that he had felt like ‘a plonker’ as the reaction from the team as a

whole was muted. In turn, and in a parallel process to the way the senior team viewed the wider management population, the Programme Management Group viewed the senior team as immature and errant. Thus the Marketing Director had to be cautioned by the Executive Director Technology not to be too directive in the proposal for fear of getting a 'push back'. At times the Programme Management Group spoke of the senior team in language similar to the way the senior team spoke about the managers suggesting that indeed this was a parallel process. The process of prioritization could have provided containment for difficult decision-making but this parallel process undermined any chance of that.

(4) Sending the work on the criteria for prioritizing back to the Programme Management Group helped the team avoid its anxiety about working collectively

At a crucial moment in the senior team meeting after the two sub-groups had worked on their own proposal for criteria and returned to the main room, the process was compromised. It was essential that the work be integrated through an additional step – it is one thing to work effectively in two sub-groups but it is important for the team to work as a whole.

However, the integrative work was avoided and the task given back to the Programme Management Group. This may have worked except that the parallel process of parent-child between the Programme Management Group and the senior team made a positive outcome unlikely. My experience in role as I observed the conversation that ensued while the team was considering the next step, was that the Programme Management Group was not experienced positively.

Challenging questions were asked regarding the purpose of the Programme Management Group – it was called the *Project* Management Group at one point – in response the Marketing Director gave a clarification of its role and the Managing Director expressed his wish that it be a place where everyone could come and participate. Despite what felt like an attack, it was minuted that the Programme Management Group would do further work on the prioritization process and present a proposal at the next senior team meeting.

It is significant that there were senior team members such as the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director Oil and Gas - other than Programme Management Group members - who had attended the PMG and yet did not offer any clarification of the questions being asked. They sat silently.

(5) Handing the task back to the Managing Director expresses a wish for traditional top-down leadership

At the subsequent Programme Management Group meeting, the Executive Director Commerce and Industry's suggestion that the Managing Director integrate the various inputs and the Managing Director's pleasure in taking up that task – 'thank you PMG' felt like the moment the team handed back the leadership to the Managing Director – as if to say, 'we don't want to make this decision – we want you to make it'. The task of prioritization exposed team members to each other's thinking and judgment in ways that provoked anxiety. To avoid this anxiety, team members withdrew from the boundaries of their roles. This was helped by a process that was compromised since it did not insist that the final decision be made collectively. This design thus becomes a channel for directing basic-

assumption dependency behaviour in which the group acts as if it is unable to work without the guidance and decisiveness of a leader. Basic assumption dependency behaviour occurs when a group acts as if it is dependent on an individual leader, or an idea (Bion, 1961). For a more comprehensive description of basic-assumption behaviour see pp.125-126.

(6) By accepting the task and further inputs the Managing Director undermines himself in his role – and the team undermines him in his role

At the moment it was decided to send the task back to the Programme Management Group, the Managing Director had invited further individual comment on email. By so doing the Managing Director undermined the work done that day in sub-groups – he effectively de-authorised the work of each sub-group and returned the process to its start point of a group of individuals with different opinions. That group members' unconscious collusion in this represents their own willingness not to recognize the value of their own collective work in sub-groups and thus undermine the process designed by the Programme Management Group on their behalf and ultimately the authority of the Managing Director who created and ran the Programme Management Group. A failure to recognize the importance of structuring and designing group work of this kind when combined with high levels of anxiety inevitably leads to outcomes like this.

(7) The Managing Director by refusing to prioritize the initiatives expresses his own resentment for the team's refusal to share leadership

The 'hit the ground running' conversation around which the team had joined so energetically in December 2008 and presented at the beginning of this strand contrasted strongly with the loud silence that followed the Managing Director's presentation on priorities in March 2009. However, the question remains as to why the Managing Director working alone was unable to articulate a clear set of priorities and instead applied a formula of weighted averages to fudge a clear statement of where senior team energies should be focussed.

From a systems psychodynamic perspective a formal leader is subject to powerful projective forces. As a parent must contain the anxieties of an infant or child without retaliating, so it is essential for formal leaders to be able to withstand the negative projections of employees and not be seduced by the positive ones – denigration and idealization are two sides of the same coin representing a currency of projective material – as described on p.114 - that is ubiquitous in a social setting in which tasks are to be performed. The data to support this hypothesis of resentment will be presented more in the next strand since during the off-site meeting and subsequent Programme Management Group meetings the Managing Director is able to articulate his own feelings of being pulled into being a traditional leader and that he resisted this because he knows 'it won't work'. The keenness of the Executive Director Commerce and Industry to reassure the Managing Director that the 'push back' had been a positive thing represents a reparative move to soothe over the aggression that the Managing Director had experienced in the muted silence and that led him to declare that he felt 'set-up'.

This concludes the interpretive analysis of strand 3 in which the team for the first time begins to reflect on its own functioning and the possibility that all is not well. The interpretive analysis of the last strand – senior team decision-making brings to the fore some of the team members personal experiences and analyses of the team's sense of its own manifest malaise.

Strand 4: Senior team decision-making

This strand of data picks up just before the last strand ended – in the early part of 2009 when team members were beginning to speak more openly about the functioning of the team. At this time it was already agreed that the HR Director would leave the company and it seemed that in so doing the strategic projects attracted less attention. Similarly at this time, the Managing Director had expressed his sense of having been set up by the team to make a decision regarding the prioritization of the shared accountability tasks on the Gantt chart of the Programme Management Group. Concerned about the difficulty the team had in making decisions an off-site meeting for June 2009 was proposed. Data collected on that day as well as subsequent Programme Management Group meetings suggested the difficulty in developing the capacity to do adaptive work. As with other strands I begin this interpretive data analysis with a summary of the main data points from the descriptive data presented in the previous chapter. These points relate mainly to the June off-site meeting followed by two Programme Management Group meetings and one-to-one meetings with the Managing Director.

Descriptive data summary

- Identification of the 'parental culture'
- Tension between what decisions must come to the centre or not
- The Managing Director expresses his wish that the strategy is 'owned' by the team

- A reluctance to challenge each other
- Executive Directors' autonomy in decision-making
- Playing at' decision-making and how this is linked to 'fuzziness' in decision making
- Collaboration is hard because of 'silos' and the structure of the role of Executive Directors
- The 'centre' is experienced as harsh
- A team within a team
- An avoidance of conflict and the expression of strong feelings 'off-line'
- Conflict between sub-groups of the senior team
- The idea that the Managing Director is being addressed indirectly
- A wish for strong leadership
- Acknowledgement of possible non-rational group processes
- Managing Director enquiries into how team members experience his request for things to be done
- Difficulty acknowledging the forward steps
- The Managing Director finishes the meeting with a call for leadership from all team members

An interpretive analysis of the senior team decision-making strand

The interpretive analysis of this strand is different from the other strands in that the team itself was engaging in reflections on its own functioning – an attempt to articulate its own analysis of what was happening and how its own behaviour was linked to the outcomes of the senior teamwork. This then addresses most directly

my second operationalized research question while still contributing to the first one about group dynamics. My interpretive analysis thus includes and augments much of the team's own analysis. Much of what they speak about supports many of the working hypotheses presented so far in strands 1-3. I start as with the other strands with a summary of the descriptive data.

(1) The use of the term 'parental culture' reflects a preoccupation with issues of authority, dependency and differentiation in the organisation as a whole

The mention of 'parental culture' on the agenda of the March 2009 senior team meeting and the Chief Financial Officer's question to the team as to whether the parental culture comes into the senior team touches upon central issues for the organisation. Managers of sales team's at Recco are concerned to be too punitive in their appraisal of subordinate sales consultants for fear of losing them – high staff turnover rates makes it difficult to sustain a culture based on widely understood operational norms – spending time to train individuals who then leave. This engenders strong feelings of dependency in managers. The senior team likewise is dependent on these managers to deliver sales – many of these managers have close personal links to particular clients whose loyalty is to the personal relationship rather than the organisation the manager happens to work for. This dependency engenders anxiety against which the senior team takes up its authority in a parental way supporting a view of the managers as immature and unprofessional. The parental culture as manifest in Recco thus serves the purpose of a defense against the anxiety of dependency. This related to questions of

autonomy raised by the Executive Director Accounting and Finance both on the March 2009 senior team meeting and the June off-site three months later.

(2) The discussion about what can be brought to the centre and what can't relates to issues of team membership and autonomy

The challenge of senior team membership in which the Managing Director is asking for team members to lead the organisation with him is that it implies that team members must be willing to hold one another accountable. Instead of being answerable to the Managing Director alone, performance of different parts of the business as well as the business as a whole are brought to the senior team for discussion and if necessary challenge. Thus team membership is anxiety provoking. However, this is only one example of the complexities of group membership. Smith and Berg (1987) outline a number of paradoxes of group life that team members must contend with. For example a group is only a group when individuals are connected to one another, yet the nature of that connection is not known to members before joining and may not be obvious even after some time. What will a group member have to give up in order to be connected to others? This is what Smith and Berg refer to as a paradox of belonging – in order to belong we must give something up, and because we don't know what this is, we become anxious and recoil from joining. Hence group membership itself raises anxiety as well as offers benefits to group membership. In a similar way, when the Executive Director Technology speaks about 'playing at decision making' he is describing a situation in which members will not risk saying what is on their mind. When the Chief Financial Officer on the June off-site meeting chose to return to the issue of

the presentation on the re-structuring of Accounting and Finance because he felt that there should have been more challenge, and when I challenge the team to increase the level of inter-personal challenge from '2' to '7' these all point to anxieties related to the risks entailed in group membership and in particular a senior team facing adaptive challenges. The concern about what can be brought to the centre and what can't refers to the degree of constraint team membership will place on individual members autonomy to do what they like.

The Executive Director Accounting and Finance's presentation about the re-structuring of A&F challenged the illusion that the 'teamwork' culture was working. The view that the company was good at teamwork was often articulated but the limits of this value were frequently encountered. The well-publicized company culture based on five values including 'teamwork' masked a reality that in fact the opposite was true. There was widespread resentment of the compensation system that rewarded individuals based on team performance. The competition between Executive Directors and the teams that worked for them belied this view of a company characterised by good teamwork.

(3) The development of sub-groups within the senior team represents the polarization of the tension in the group between what needs to change and who will bear the consequences of those changes

The sub-groups that manifest clearly on the off-site day in June 2009 had been present for some months. The fact that 14 shared accountability tasks listed on the Gantt chart used by the Programme Management Group were now marked 'delayed' had become the central issue for the team. The HR Director had been

fired, the projects although a continual potential target for negative affect were no longer a convincing explanation for the malaise of the team. The failure of the prioritization process documented in strand 3 was the beginning of a reflection process culminating in the June off-site meeting in 2009. The splitting and projection dynamics - as outlined on pp.114-115 - involving the HR Director and the strategic projects which had provided the means to manage anxieties related to the overall performance of the organisation no longer served this purpose. The sub-groups now served that purpose of attempting to contain anxieties. The question is how? What do these sub-groupings represent? Firstly they represent another manifestation of the 'parental culture' dynamic – the language and tone of address between the Managing Director and Marketing Director toward the 3 'junior' Executive Directors was similar to the language used to address the wider management population. Secondly, it was, as the Executive Director Technology pointed out, not that they were 'junior' but more that if there was work to be done it was most likely to 'land' on their shoulders. The assumption of a parental tone with the three Executive Directors is related to anxieties about dependency. The Managing Director and Marketing Director were dependent on the Executive Directors to deliver sales targets and to implement new initiatives that addressed the adaptive challenges the organisation faced. Anxiety about what and how to change in order to deal with the volatility of the marketplace required collectively agreed approaches to market that demanded levels of co-ordination from Executive Directors that had never been required before.

(4) The hiring of a new Executive Director is designed to challenge a regressive sibling dynamic that undermined the capacity of the team members to develop mature relationships with one another based on reciprocal risk-taking and trust-building

My earliest interpretation to the team in 2007 was that the team felt very 'familial'.

I wasn't able to elaborate much more at the time and my interpretation was not taken up. The sibling dynamics were referred to by the Executive Director Oil and Gas – of the Executive Director Technology as the eldest child who could do no wrong and as the Executive Director Legal Services as the youngest and the favourite who could sit on 'daddy's lap' leaving her as the middle child, never quite good enough and feeling invisible. Another Executive Director, described by the Executive Director Legal Services, as the 'runt of the litter' was fired in late 2005 before I arrived. The HR Director, recently fired, had never been part of this dynamic and the Marketing Director also a relatively new hire was also excluded. The Chief Financial Officer, by age and status, and often seeming aloof – speaking rarely during team meetings - was also clearly not part of these dynamics. What the 'siblings' had in common was history and recruitment. Membership of this sibling group was related in some way to all of them having started working together. The Executive Director Legal Services had also referred to the founders as having set down some of the norms that now represented important aspects of the organisation's culture. Separated from his siblings by having been promoted to Managing Director, the question that I often pondered was related to the Managing Director role. Was he really accepted as the leader or was he the eldest sibling with the precarious role of trying to be a parent. In any case, the hiring of the very

different Executive Director Accounting and Finance was a deliberate move to 'shake things up'. This was confirmed in one-to-one meetings. She had an unquestionable recruitment pedigree and she was very different. She was also hated. The Executive Director Legal Services comment that the Managing Director would allow her to do 'what the f*** she likes', confirmed by the Executive Director Oil and Gas in private, meant that the new Executive Director provoked strong emotions both positive and negative. Both the Executive Director Oil and Gas and Legal Services were furious with the Managing Director for hiring her. In contrast the Marketing Director welcomed the new Executive Director and they established an effective working relationship.

Acting as if they were competing siblings prevented the team from developing a more mature set of relationships in which support and challenge would create a culture of reciprocal risk-taking. This is related to the threat to selfhood that team membership can constitute (Smith and Berg, 1987).

(5) Team members' difficulty in thinking beyond individual accounts of behaviour reflected the industries preoccupation with the individual curriculum vitae (CV) and contributed to the team being unable to build on the progress made during the off-site meeting

The team members reported informally to the Managing Director following the off-site that it had been a successful day. The Marketing Director had shown courage in articulating how he often felt he was set up to fill the vacuum left by the Executive Directors. Several other team members were willing to say what was on their minds thus bringing more authenticity to the team culture. At the two

Programme Management Group meetings, one in September 2009 and one in early October 2009, it seemed that the possibility of building on the positive work of the senior team at the June off-site might be sustained. However, this was not to be the case. Even though the Managing Director was able to model to an extent a more systemic form of thinking (he was able to articulate how the system influenced him and how this led him to behave in a certain way) other team members were unable to match this. One reason for this is the way in which the nature of the task the organisation was involved in – recruitment – influenced the way team members made sense of their experience. In an industry in which the individual CV was the main focus, it was difficult to understand individual behaviour in any other way. Individual behaviour could not be understood systemically but was a function of the individuals 'strengths and weaknesses' and personal history. In such an environment the ordinary risks that individuals take in working together become more magnified and a culture in which everyone is scrutinising each other's behaviour for signs that would indicate individual competence is created. In such an environment it is hard for a team to develop. This is an important psychodynamic principle –the way the nature of the task that a group is engaged in comes to be reflected in behavioural dynamics (Neumann, 1999).

(6) The Managing Director failed to provide the containment required for team members to be able to do the adaptive work necessary

The psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's notion of containment (Winnicott, 1971, 1965) – taken up by social science researchers at the Tavistock

Institute and applied to organisations – Heifetz and Laurie (1997) refer to a 'holding environment' - is based on the maternal figure able to absorb the anxieties of the child and in most cases to interpret the source of distress and to offer comfort. The key to containment is not just the ability to interpret but also the capacity to withstand powerful emotional affect without retaliation. Within the field of psychotherapy retaliation would be termed 'counter-transference' in which the projections onto the therapist by the patient are not understood as transferential projections from formative relational experiences but as real attacks that must be responded to accordingly – these dynamics were described earlier on p.121. The organisational equivalent relevant to leadership is the capacity of a formally appointed leader to bear the negative projections that may ensue when he or she does not take up the leadership role as subordinates may unconsciously wish (Klein, 1979). The shift from traditional top-down leadership to shared leadership because of the implications for how relationships between team members will be altered is likely to provoke anxiety.

While stating his wish that team members take up leadership, the Managing Director failed to acknowledge the risks that team members faced in doing so and so was intolerant of team members' behaviour. He was able finally to speak about the way in which he felt the team wanted him to be more direct but he struggled to present his experience to the team as an opportunity for reflection and learning. Thus these experiences were lost as opportunities for growth and development and adaptive work in relation to how the team could lead as a whole.

The wish for the Managing Director to take up his leadership in a more traditional way manifest during the off-site meeting when despite numerous protestations

about his use of the phrase 'zero tolerance' there was a general sense of relief when he became angry and demonstrative about it at the end of the day. His outburst was so rare and the relief it brought to the team so palpable that it draws questions about whether he *chose* to take up his authority in this way – hoping for shared leadership because he believed it was the best way to address the adaptive issues the company faced – or indeed he was simply incapable of being more directive under most circumstances.

In any case, the team attempted to get the Managing Director to take up his leadership in a way that would relieve team members of the anxiety of having to work with each other in new ways requiring them to articulate and work with the primary risk (Hirschhorn, 1999) they faced in determining the relationship between the company and its environment.

Meta-level analysis

Having outlined several working hypotheses for each strand it is finally necessary to look *across* strands to synthesise these provisional statements into a number of meta-level statements based on links between the case data and systems psychodynamic theory about this attempt to implement shared leadership in the face of adaptive challenges. This involves an iterative process of reading over the interpretive analyses – the 28 working hypothesis in total for all four strands - several times and then working to articulate a set of statements that capture all of them.

Firstly I attempted to articulate in writing several versions of the statements shown below while reading and re-reading the list of working hypotheses presented in this chapter. Having written four of the five meta-level statements I then worked in the opposite way to look back at each of the 28 hypotheses and see which if the 4 meta-level statements were reflected in each hypothesis. The purpose of this was twofold – firstly to see if I could further refine the meta-level statements and secondly to ensure that all of the hypotheses were covered. I printed out all the 28 hypotheses developed for the four strands and then attempted to match against the four statements I had made. I decided that a fifth was required and having added this was able to match all 28 with at least one of the 5 meta-level interpretive statements – A, B, C, D and E.

The first refers to the way in which the Managing Director as the formal leader failed to understand the ways in which team members would respond to the way he took up his leadership. The second interpretive statement, B, refers to the way in which team members continually looked for a more traditional leadership stance from the Managing Director as a means of containing anxieties about having to work with each other; C refers to the way team members retreat from that aspect of their roles as senior team members that relates to running the company as a whole; the fourth statement, D, refers to the way in which anxieties related to making a strategic choice – the failure to articulate the ‘primary risk’ that team members’ faced by trying to position the company in the market place led to the team recoiling from the boundary with the outside world; the fifth interpretive statement relates to how the growth of the company and the nature of the

recruitment industry served to exacerbate anxieties associated with the implementation of shared leadership. These five statements are show below:

(A) Over the course of the team's work, the way the formal leadership role was taken up by the Managing Director provoked powerful group dynamics that were not understood or managed. The Managing Director failing to notice these dynamics and understand their source while at the same time insisting that tasks be worked collectively meant that anxieties related to the adaptive challenges the organization faced could not be contained. As a result the unaddressed group dynamics undermined the possibility of shared leadership and ensured that the required adaptive learning was less likely to occur.

(B) In the face of adaptive challenges the organization faced, the attempt to implement shared leadership was experienced not as a means to alleviate anxieties associated with the required adaptive work but to augment it. Team members looked for more traditional leadership from the Managing Director, not because it was necessarily required but because it allowed them to avoid engaging with each other in their roles as senior team members. The Managing Director's refusal to adopt a traditional stance was thus deeply resented.

(C) Team members did not perceive that part of their role was related to running the company as a whole. Team members retreated from the necessary work of engaging one another in the work of running the organization as a whole and to this extent shared leadership was unlikely. Team members were unwilling to mobilize the requisite aggression necessary to do this work. In order to do so they would have had to claim a part of the Managing Director role for themselves and by so doing authorize the Managing Director in his role. Because team members did not accept this aspect of their roles it was impossible to evolve a sense of shared purpose. The result was that the team members consistently withdrew from role boundaries that in turn distorted reality and relationships. By not taking up that aspect of their role related to running the company as a whole, they effectively de-authorized the Managing Director and the team of which they were a part.

(D) Senior team members' failure to build a consensus about a strategic direction for the company in response to its external adaptive challenges – a failure to articulate the primary risk team members faced by choosing a strategy - created anxiety in response to which team members recoiled from the boundary with the external world and substituted internal managerial issues for externally oriented leadership concerns.

(E) The growth of the company and the requirement to build a more complex organization exacerbated the anxieties provoked by the attempt to implement shared leadership. Team members were challenged to relate to one another in new ways through shared leadership and at the same time deal with anxieties related to how their own roles and those of the people who reported to them were becoming more complex. These anxieties were further exacerbated by an industry focus on the individual curriculum vitae making it more likely that organizational issues would be seen through the lens of individual competence.

Conclusions

To the extent that statements in a study employing a clinical fieldwork approach in the systems psychodynamic tradition are always provisional these five meta-level paragraphs and the 28 minor working hypotheses they are based on constitute the findings of this study. How such findings and indeed the study as a whole can be seen as a contribution to theory will be taken up in the next and final chapter.

Chapter 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter discusses the possible contributions to theory made by this study based on its findings. The opening sentence of this thesis was:

‘A key controversy within leadership studies is whether leadership can be conceptualised as a specialized role occupied by individuals or as a shared influence process amongst all members of a group’ (Yukl, 2006).

This statement reflects central debates within the leadership literature. Those debates centre around claims that a new ontology of leadership is required that challenges the dominant entity-based perspective (Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012; Drath et al, 2008; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The shared leadership literature represents the most coherent body of ‘post-heroic’ leadership theory (Badaracco, 2001) that presents leadership as a shared influence process among all team members.

Although often understood to be the same, distributed leadership is distinct from shared leadership based on the historical emergence of two different constructs in two distinct research communities. The distributed leadership literature no less coherent in terms of its development addresses a whole organisation – a school – as the main unit of analysis. I chose to focus on the former – with a focus on teams - as the best way to address the gap identified in the literature and thus used the term ‘shared leadership’ for this study.

However, this has not been a study of a new phenomenon called shared leadership. It has been the study of a team in which the Managing Director said he wanted the whole team to lead the organisation - something that is not uncommon in my experience. This empirically maps on to the concept that a group of US based researchers were referring to as 'shared' leadership and thus gave an opportunity to explore the conceptual frameworks and empirical claims that make up this literature. By so doing, this case also provided an opportunity to integrate discussions regarding a new leadership ontology (as introduced on pp.24-29) with new models of leadership broadly referred to as 'post-heroic' leadership of which shared leadership is the most highly developed conceptually.

The contributions presented here while structured around the shared leadership literature also address these fundamental ontological questions and thus constitute not only a contribution to the shared leadership literature but to the wider debates about leadership. Thus a number of questions are addressed in this chapter. What is known about shared leadership now that wasn't known before this study was carried out? How does this study contribute to knowledge about leadership, shared or otherwise? How can these claims to knowledge be substantiated from the findings of this study? What are the limitations of this study? What are the implications for practice that this study suggests based on its findings? What directions for future research are suggested by the findings? Finally I will consider my personal learning having written this thesis and end with some conclusions about this study as a whole.

I will start by considering three important aspects of this study, a single case study of a senior team undertaking adaptive work in which there was an attempt to implement shared leadership. The following three aspects are important with regard the quality of data collected and thus the strength of knowledge claims and contribution to theory that this study makes.

(1) A high level of access

Data were collected with full access to the work of a senior team as it went about its business. This team only met in full once a month, and I attended almost every meeting during the period of data collection. I was not excluded from any agenda items pertaining to the running of the company. I was also a permanent member of a smaller sub-group of this senior team that met weekly. The purpose of this sub-group was to consider progress against a list of tasks considered adaptive and for which there was in their own language 'shared accountability'. In addition I was able to informally and formally arrange meetings with all team members over this period. The nature of the data presented in this thesis suggests strongly a high level of trust and inclusion and thus a high value to the data collected.

(2) Data were collected continuously

The data collected were not collected through interviews conducted at one point in time and then repeated at some later date. My data collection on senior team meeting days ranged over eight hours including lunchtime when team members sat informally talking. The off-site meetings also extended over several hours and across two days. This included informal dinners with the team members and train

and taxi rides. This access to group process and to a range of configurations of team members from individual contact and small groups of two and three, to the full team allowed for the collection of rich, highly contextual data unfolding in the moment.

(3) Data were collected over a long period

A researcher sitting in the senior team in December 2008 when the team seemed buoyant and determined might reach a different set of conclusions if they had had the opportunity of sitting with the same team six months later when the upbeat nature of that December meeting would then be understood very differently when it was realized that the commitments made had not been honoured. This study is based on the collection of data over an 18-month period with background data available for 18 months prior to that. Many of the issues senior teams contend with lead to planned actions that will take several months to implement. The benefits of being able to sustain contact with the team over such a long period and to have access to its public concerns over its own performance as well as the private reflections of its individual members adds considerable weight to the knowledge claims I make derived from this quality of data.

With these three aspects of my research in mind I will now consider what this thesis contributes to knowledge about shared leadership and by implication how it contributes to wider debates within leadership studies.

The origins of the shared leadership literature

The development of the shared leadership construct, has been confined to the work of a group of largely North American researchers who were undertaking scholarly studies in the area of self-managed teams (Cox and Sims, 1996; Nygren and Levine, 1996; Manz and Newstrom, 1990). By the mid-1990s there was concern that the notion of leadership within the teams literature had been ignored (Beyerlein et al, 1996). The implementation of the 'bossless team' (Barry, 1991) might not be so straightforward after all; such teams may create a set of rules every bit as constraining as the most directive of formally appointed leaders (Barker, 1993). They then began to explore through a number of conceptual papers and empirical studies reviewed in this thesis, the idea that leadership might be something that all members of a team can do. They began describing this perspective on leadership as 'shared leadership' and contrasted it with traditional leadership models. Claiming that this new perspective was empirically driven, they linked shared leadership to the widespread use of self-managed teams in American industry – a response to the effects of globalization, deregulation and new technologies on the markets in which American companies were operating in (Avolio et al, 1996) - shared leadership as an adaptive response to a changing world. Seen as a potential solution to the challenges of dealing with the increased complexity and ambiguity of the workplace (Pearce and Conger, 2003), the virtues of implementing shared leadership were extolled by authors within the field.

The gap in the literature

The gap my literature review identified and where I sought through this study to make a contribution, is related to the need to explore in greater detail the fine-grained dynamics of what was going on in a team as it tried to implement what the literature referred to as shared leadership. There had been no studies of this kind. Furthermore much of what was written in the literature pointed to the potential importance of affective factors as antecedent conditions for the emergence or successful implementation of shared leadership in teams. The distributed leadership literature, which though offering an alternative methodology was unable to capture the fine-grained affective dynamics that were potentially so important to whether shared leadership would emerge or be effectively implemented.

Both literatures positioned their constructs as responses to adaptive challenges – the need to learn collectively in response to a challenge for which existing knowledge, skills, or resources, were inadequate (Heifetz, 1994). The work of Heifetz – as outlined on pp. 129-131 - suggested that such adaptive work would invoke ‘systemic distress’ - a group level phenomenon. This study has made use of Heifetz’s notion of adaptive work tracing his ideas to their systems psychodynamic roots in order to explore what he calls systemic affect with more nuance than is possible by using his more practitioner focussed conceptual framework.

The upbeat normative tone of the literature proposed shared leadership as a model of leadership best suited for adaptive work. Since from a systems

psychodynamic perspective an attempt to implement shared leadership is likely to be associated with systemic distress or anxiety then it seemed possible that the literature, particularly the shared leadership literature was underestimating the potential difficulties of implementing shared leadership as a way of facilitating adaptive work. From a systems psychodynamic perspective it seemed likely that rather than facilitating adaptive work it would possibly make it less likely to occur since rather than alleviating systemic anxiety associated with adaptive work, shared leadership might mobilize a further layer of group level distress and thus *compound* the problem. There was nothing in either the shared or distributed leadership literatures that considered these potential difficulties.

A significant reason why the literatures on shared leadership and distributed leadership are unable to capture data associated with systemic distress is due to methodological constraints. The entity-based approaches that dominate the shared leadership literature are often contrasted with social constructionist research methodologies (Uhl-Bien, 2006) and have led to a polarization of approaches (Fitzsimons, 2012). This has inhibited access to potentially significant group level phenomena – such as systemic affect associated with attempts to implement shared leadership as a means to conduct adaptive work. Thus another contribution that this study seeks to make is a methodological one based on highlighting problems in the way the main constructs of shared and distributed leadership are being theorised. Since as Hatch and Yannow (2008) point out, the word ‘methodology’ can be understood as ‘applied ontology and epistemology’, by making a methodological contribution, this study also claims to make a

contribution to important ontological debates not only within the shared leadership literature but more widely to debates within leadership studies. I therefore set out to apply a well-established research methodology – a clinical fieldwork model based on a systems psychodynamic perspective (Miller, 1995; Schein, 1987)- to address these important issues. This approach was described on pp.140-145. The shared leadership construct, positioned as a response to adaptive challenges, required a research methodology capable both of exploring process and of articulating group level affective dynamics associated with an attempt to implement shared leadership in a group undertaking adaptive work. A research methodology based on a systems psychodynamic perspective is able to do that.

Since from a systems psychodynamic perspective leadership is always seen as a group level phenomenon whether shared or not, this study did not attempt to provide a new definition of shared leadership but instead considered that when a leader articulates a wish for the team as a whole to provide leadership to the organization and acts accordingly then this constituted a good representation empirically of what the literature was referring to as shared leadership. This study sought to join the scholarly ‘dialogue’ about shared and distributed leadership and in so doing also sought to explore issues that are central to the broader scholarly conversation that constitutes leadership studies as a whole. The overarching research question reflects this broader agenda while still staying true to its focus on the shared leadership literature and its focus on teams:

How can the study of an attempt to implement shared leadership in an executive team, using a systems psychodynamic perspective, contribute to our understanding of leadership responses to adaptive challenges?

This question was then operationalized in two separate questions:

RQ1. How does an attempt to implement shared leadership affect the group dynamics within a senior team?

RQ2. How do team members relate these experiences to their perception of the tasks that the senior team is charged with achieving?

Based on the findings of this study and the above outline of the intended areas of contribution, I will begin by outlining the four main contributions this study makes to leadership theory. I will then address more specific contributions related to issues raised within the shared leadership literature.

Contributions to theory

These contributions are presented in two parts: firstly, four general contributions within the shared leadership literature that also touch on issues related to wider ontological debates within leadership studies; and secondly, some specific

contributions to issues raised within the shared leadership literature. The four general contributions are:

(i) A reformulation of the shared leadership construct that allows for the further elucidation of key issues raised within this literature

(ii) A conceptualization of leadership as a group level construct and the elaboration of theory related to it.

(iii) Elaborating research methods that engage with process and showing what that process looks like and how it changes over time

(iv) Extending the application and augmenting the relevance of system psychodynamic theory by integrating it into key theoretical debates within both shared leadership and the broader leadership literature

Although these contributions are presented as discrete, they are all related and cumulative to the extent that they each contribute to one another.

(i) A reformulation of the shared leadership construct that allows for the further elucidation of key issues raised within this literature

By reformulating the shared leadership construct in relational terms the limitations of shared leadership theories based on entity theories of the self can be overcome, expanding and deepening the research agenda in the field. In particular the challenge to account for the potential for patterns of systemic affect to hamper attempts to implement shared leadership in the face of adaptive challenges can be explored once the individual is conceived in more relational rather than entity terms.

The intention of researchers within the shared leadership literature is to explore an alternative view of leadership that goes beyond heroic individualised accounts. This intention remains a legitimate concern of leadership scholars. This thesis highlights how by continuing to theorise the self as an entity, the aspirations of the research community engaged in exploring shared leadership are constrained by a set of ontological assumptions that limit exploration of key issues.

One consequence of this can be clearly seen in an editorial written by Craig Pearce and his colleagues as part of a special issue on shared leadership in 2010.

'Shared leadership occurs when group members actively and intentionally shift the role of leader to one another as necessitated by the environment or circumstances in which the group operates' (Pearce, Hoch, Jeppesen and Wegge, 2010, p.151)

This, written in 2010, by probably the most prolific author in the field – Craig Pearce – shows that the adaptive response to the environment is construed within the confines of serial emergence of leaders with no systemic analysis possible. However, this thesis by proposing an alternative relational view of shared

leadership opens the field of enquiry. For example, the Group Exchange Structure model (Seibert et al., 2003) describes the dangers of scapegoating or defensive behaviours between sub-groupings in a team; despite highlighting these dynamics the model struggles to extend the analysis beyond simply stating that under certain circumstances particular structures of reciprocal relating may be problematic. This is as far as an entity-based view will allow the analysis to go. This thesis provides the means by which the limitations of the shared leadership construct can be overcome and the potential research agenda in the field to be augmented by offering a perspective which facilitates firstly the engagement with process that the literature explicitly calls for and secondly the taking of a systemic view on the dynamics that unfold when shared leadership is implemented.

The way in which the HR Director was scapegoated and fired, the splitting of the senior team into sub-groups toward the end of its work in mid-2009 and the senior team's characterisation of the wider management population are examples of how a shared leadership perspective can be augmented once the notion of individuals as entities is expanded into a relational view. Examples of how this thesis contributes to specific issues such as the one raised in Seibert et al's chapter on Group Exchange Structure are described in a separate section below.

(ii) A conceptualization of leadership as a group level construct and the elaboration of theory related to it.

This study contributes to theory by conceptualizing shared leadership in a way that is more aligned with the definitions of shared leadership that researchers in the field have themselves proposed. This group level construct does not rely on leadership to be conceptualized as shared – it applies to leadership, shared or otherwise and as such this conceptualization constitutes a contribution to leadership studies in general.

One way that entity-based approaches to leadership have elaborated a group level construct is to adapt the line items of leadership style survey questionnaires to ‘group’ rather than ‘the leader’. For example, ‘my team leader expects me to perform at my highest level’, becomes, ‘my team members expect me to perform at my highest level’. Each team member then uses a scale, usually a five-point Likert scale, to indicate to what extent he or she agrees with statements regarding group level influence. The mean of these results for each line item is taken and aggregated up to give a score for each member that is then averaged for the team as a whole. In this way shared leadership as a group level construct can only be understood as the sum of attributed influence corresponding to a range of leadership styles. It is assumed that the implicit group structure (Seibert et al., 2003) is unified with no sub-groups or coalitions.

A second way that shared leadership theorists attempt to capture data related to the group as a whole is to use social network analysis. Individuals are asked to identify to which of the other team members they would attribute leadership. The resulting measures of network density and centralization (Mayo et al., 2003) allow for patterns of influence to be elaborated and presented visually in sociograms. Both of these approaches fail to take into account the possibility of systemic affect in groups. The system psychodynamic conceptual framework offers the possibility to understand behaviours expressed by individuals as manifestations of group level processes (Miller, 1989; Bion, 1961). The approach theorizes the link between the emotional needs of individuals and the social, cultural and political contexts in which they are situated and *vice versa* (Gould, 2001). For example, during a period when the senior team was attempting to prioritize the shared accountability tasks on the Gantt chart, the team process that led to the task of prioritization to be handed back to the Programme Management Group and subsequently back to the Managing Director who asserted that he felt 'set up', can not be easily understood as simply the sum of individual influence or a function of individual psychologies – neither would be captured by either the aggregating of attributed influence based on questionnaires or by social network analysis. A systems psychodynamic approach can capture such data and develop theory of associated group level phenomena such as a leader being 'set up' by a team, or an individual being scapegoated – a group level phenomena suggested strongly by the firing of the HR Director.

Other examples of a group level perspective on shared leadership from the findings of this study include the consistent way in which the senior team characterized the management population as immature and feckless. The senior team had itself elaborated a group level description of some of its own behaviour by using the phrase 'parental culture' to describe a pervasive attitude amongst senior managers including themselves. In a similar fashion, the consistent way in which the strategic projects were discussed as if they were outside the senior team suggests the possibility of a subtle but significant group level phenomenon, since the result was that senior team members acting as sponsors were never confronted.

The silence of those team members who had attended Programme Management Group meetings and could help explain the purpose of the group and say something of their own experience, contributed to a dynamic in which the Programme Management Group was experienced as controlling and exclusive. Their silence was not simply a function of personal psychologies. In a similar way the emergence of sub-groupings of the senior team during an off-site meeting – of 'junior' Executive Directors and the Managing Director, Chief Financial Officer, Marketing Director and newly hired Executive Director, can also be understood as a group level phenomenon reflecting very real concerns about on whom the burden of change would fall.

From a systems psychodynamic perspective, the group expresses itself through individuals and so manifest individual behaviour is understood to be both a

function of the individual *and* the group (Hayden and Molenkamp, 2004; Miller 1989; Bion, 1961). Since each of these examples of group level phenomena outlined in the case study was associated with the attempt to implement shared leadership the importance of understanding such phenomena is clear.

Another important contribution that this study makes is based on the ways in which a systems psychodynamic approach enables research that engages with process.

(iii) Elaborating research methods that engage with process and showing what that process looks like and how it changes over time

Shared leadership is defined in the literature variously: as a 'simultaneous, on-going, mutual influence process within a team' (Ensley et al., 2006, p.218); that it represents a 'condition of mutual influence embedded in the interactions among team members' (Carson et al., 2007, p.1218); or that it emerges through an 'unfolding series of fluid, situationally appropriate exchanges of lateral influence (Cox et al. 2003); or defined by Pearce and Conger (2003) in their landmark book, 'Shared Leadership: Reframing the hows and whys of leadership', define shared leadership, as 'a dynamic interactive influence process between individuals in groups for which the purpose is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both'. These definitions of shared leadership clearly point toward a focus on process and yet these authors continue to operationalize shared

leadership from an entity-based perspective which struggle to engage with process (Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012). Instead of seeing leadership as the input to group processes as in entity-based studies, leadership is seen as the outcome of team processes in which individuals work on shared tasks (Day, Gronn and Salas, 2004) then a focus on such processes is given additional legitimacy.

This study makes a methodological contribution to leadership theory – not only shared leadership theory - by outlining and deploying research methods that show how process can be engaged with in a social system – whether leadership is being shared or not. In addition this study shows not only what that process can look like – revealing the complexity and intricacies of the lived experience of team members as they attempt to work adaptively – but also shows how that process can change over time. Both of these constitute contributions to leadership theory and to shared leadership theory, not least because both empirical studies and conceptual frameworks in the shared leadership literature make specific reference to the need for more fine-grained studies of shared leadership (Ensley et al., 2006; Mehra et al., 2006; Pearce and Conger, 2003).

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the debate between entity approaches and process-oriented approaches to knowing can be traced back to two competing pre-Socratic worldviews or cosmologies – one traditionally ascribed to Heraclitus and the other to Parmenides (Chia, 1997). The first sees reality as ever changing and emergent while the other view emphasises the more permanent unchangeable

aspects of reality. Bergson (1913) points out that an epistemology that emphasizes process and emergence does not eschew entities entirely. On the contrary, structure and process are related in a co-evolutionary cyclical relationship – focussing on process leads to a new albeit temporary sense of order that will dissipate as other phenomena constitute a new flow of process until another different order is experienced (Cooper, 1976). A critical assumption related to this processual view of reality is that the process in which a situation emerges critically influences the meaning that will be attributed to it. This creates an imperative not to rely on measurements of entities at two separate points in time as an exclusive source of knowledge. It is essential to experience the process in order to ascribe meaning to events as they unfold (Ladkin, 2010; Chia, 1997). This study by presenting data collected while team members were fully engaged in the process of adaptive work allowed me to be present to the unfolding nature of events within the team at a particular time and context. Such an approach constitutes a contribution to leadership studies since entity-based do not engage with process (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Examples of the importance of this approach can be seen for example in the experience of participating as members of the Programme Management Group spent 45 minutes discussing the definition of ‘development’ even though the agenda item was related to the future of the strategic project team following the firing of the HR Director. The significance of this experience could only be understood by sitting in the discussion as a clinical fieldworker in the role of consultant. The significance of the moment the Managing Director accepted the

offer to take the prioritisation task on his own shoulders, could only be understood by having been not only present in this meeting but also having been at the senior team meeting a few days before when the senior team as a whole had balked from continuing the prioritization process they had started in sub-groups. The closing twenty minutes of the meeting at which the decision was made to ask the Programme Management Group to continue the process was so nuanced with subtle commentary that only being present to the rapidly shifting tonality of the emerging dynamic could have registered what might have been going on. This relates to the second contribution that this process oriented research methodology provided – accounts of how the process changed over time. The longitudinal nature of this study – 18 months – offers an exceptional insight into the ways in which meanings that both myself and team members attributed to their own experience, and the explanatory and interpretive analysis that I built thereafter, changed over time. The team throughout most of 2008 was convinced of the inefficiency of the projects and did not explore the possibility that the performance of the projects were a reflection of the functioning of the senior team. This changed only after several months as the team began to struggle to prioritize its shared leadership tasks and after the HR Director had been asked to leave the company. Such insights are only possible by undertaking a longitudinal study of the kind represented by this study particularly since the effects of senior managerial work of this kind - with long lead times for implementation – may only manifest after some months.

(iv) Extending the application and augmenting the relevance of system psychodynamic theory by integrating it into key theoretical debates within both shared leadership and the broader leadership literature

While this study did not set out specifically to contribute to knowledge within the systems psychodynamic literature, a contribution to this literature is made in three ways. Firstly this thesis integrates the systems psychodynamic concepts into central debates in the shared and broader leadership literatures. The literature review in this thesis presents numerous examples of where seminal studies and researchers from this field are cited but not engaged with – the literature is referred to but not related to in terms of exploring its conceptual framework or how it might be relevant to this new field.

The second way this thesis contributes to the systems psychodynamic literature is how, by the process of integration, the salience of specific concepts of the perspective – particularly the relational self – is highlighted in ways that are not easily discerned within the literature. While descriptions of the intra-psychic world of individuals from an Object Relations perspective (Gomez, 1997) are familiar within the systems psychodynamic literature, the juxtaposing of this concept with entity perspectives on the self within the leadership studies domain

is not commonplace. By so doing the centrality of the relational self to the systems psychodynamic perspective is highlighted. For example, the entity-based view of how relations are entered into – rational strategies for engaging others in pursuit of mutual goals contrasts so markedly with systems psychodynamic accounts in which relationships can exist *a priori* – that we unconsciously recruit others into our inner dramas. It is in such contrasts that the centrality of the relational self is highlighted since this thesis outlines the ways in which such recruiting is only possible when the self is understood to be shaped by who others imagine and need us to be. By implication this thesis also highlights the centrality of the embodied self to the systems psychodynamic perspective in ways that are usually not accentuated in this literature. By emphasising the rational foci of the objectivist research paradigm that underpins entity-based approaches, the relevance of a systems psychodynamic perspective is made all the clearer.

The third way in which this thesis contributes to the systems psychodynamic literature is by the richness of the interpretive analysis and the ‘audit trail’ of data analysis from early descriptive data and explanatory analysis to the interpretive analysis presented in chapter 6. While accounts of the ways in which psychodynamic concepts can be used to make sense of emerging organisational dynamics are numerous (Huffington et al, 2004; Obholzer, 2001; Shapiro, 2001; Gilmore and Krantz, 1985) there are few studies that present such comprehensive data coverage from early exploratory analyses to the meta-level analyses presented at the end of chapter 6. The ways in which the 28 working hypotheses presented across the four strands of data, their synthesis into the 5 meta-

statements and the way they can be traced back to the earlier phases of data collection constitute a contribution to a literature in which such detailed and such comprehensive accounts are rare.

Contributions to leadership theory based on specific issues within the shared leadership literature

Notwithstanding the ontological divide that separates this study from much of the shared leadership literature, it does contribute knowledge to a number of issues raised within particular studies in the field. At the same time, each of the examples illustrated, also highlights the limitations of entity-based approaches to leadership.

This study addresses a need recognised in several of the main empirical studies and conceptual frameworks of this literature that explicitly call for a study of the ‘fine-grained’ dynamics of shared leadership in a team. The level of granularity in my study allows for both the elaboration of a number of key findings which point toward future research and at the same time addresses a number of specific theoretical issues raised in the literature.

There are many potential areas in which this study can contribute. For example, the conceptual framework of Mayo et al. (2003) promotes a clearer understanding of the importance of relational dynamics in shared leadership by measures of social network density rather than just network concentration but the model is unable to capture the micro-processes of group life. Mehra et al. (2006) also using social network analysis reveal the importance of mutual recognition between individuals attributed with leadership; but the model does not explore what might be going on in a team that would lead two recognized leaders not to acknowledge one another. Cox et al. (2003) outline a conceptual framework of shared leadership in New Product Development teams and suggest that vertical leaders

trying to implement shared leadership must carry out 'leadership support' and 'leadership maintenance' to ensure an adequate balance is maintained between 'abdication' and holding on too tightly to the formal leadership role; but this framework does not allow for the exploration of how these complex dynamics might actually be played out in teams as they work. The Group Exchange Structure model (Seibert et al., 2003) describes the dangers of scapegoating or defensive behaviours between sub-groupings in a team but does not provide actual descriptions of such relational dynamics as they are occurring or suggest why they may occur. The same is true for the description of how shared cognition could be related to the emergence of shared leadership (Burke et al., 2003); attitudinal factors such as 'open climate' and 'collective orientation' are theorized as being important but there is no detail of how these might be enacted. Carson et al. (2007) theorise the importance of antecedent factors such as 'voice' and 'social support' in the emergence of shared leadership but not the methodological means to explore how such factors may manifest in a team as they work.

Although there is a wide range of constructs described in these studies they could all be further elucidated by a process-based research agenda such as the one exemplified by this study. Such issues are clearly considered important and as Pearce and Conger (2003) point out there have been few if any in-depth studies of 'the fine-grained dynamics of how leadership is shared in group and organizational settings' (Pearce and Conger 2003, p.286) that might shed light on them. I will consider three examples to demonstrate how this study contributes to existing theory.

(i) The social network analysis approach adopted by Mehra et al. (2006) to explore the relationship between networks of distributed leadership in teams and performance is a good example. Having identified the difference between networks in which individuals to whom leadership is attributed acknowledge one another and networks where they do not - the first they refer to as a distributed co-ordinated network and the second as a distributed fragmented network - leads the authors to speculate on what further research could reveal.

'Was there constant jockeying for power among the formal and emergent leaders in distributed-fragmented structures? Answering the question of, as one reviewer put it, what it actually felt like to work in teams with different leadership structures will probably require researchers to supplement the traditional tools of structural analysis with more qualitative techniques....we think it would be valuable for future research to supplement network analyses by zooming in for more fine-grained, up-close observations of what day-to-day existence in teams with different leadership networks is like.' (Mehra et al., 2006, p.243)

Do the insights into the team dynamics presented by the findings of this study provide any worthwhile contribution to the questions raised by Mehra et al.? Since I did not carry out network analysis to supplement my own study it is not possible to address the precise questions they raise. However, this study clearly suggests that the reasons why individuals may or may not be recognized as leaders are complex. It is quite possible that the pairing of the Marketing Director and the new Executive Director for example could easily be seen by some as providing

leadership and that each would acknowledge the other as providing leadership in the team – thus forming a distributed-co-ordinated network in the language of Mehra et al.'s study. However, to understand this pairing, this study shows how a systems psychodynamic perspective can elucidate the group level phenomena that may underpin the relationship between the Marketing Director and the new Executive Director. For example, the Marketing Director was constantly frustrated with the 'vacuum' he experienced in response to the various initiatives he proposed to the more 'junior' Executive Directors. In addition, the new Executive Director was disliked intensely by at least two of these junior Executive Directors hence her pairing with the Marketing Director can be best understood when seen as part of a web of relational dynamics related to unconscious group level dynamics. Thus the relationship in the pairing of the Marketing Director and the new Executive Director can only be understood in such a context. This pairing was further complicated by the relationship between the new Executive Director and the Managing Director who had deliberately recruited her to 'stir things up'. Several other layers from this study could be added which demonstrate the complexity of group life in a senior team working adaptively. Just identifying a pair of leaders who recognize or don't recognize each other as the social network analysis shows is unlikely to reveal such dynamics. Such accounts of pairings of this kind presented in the findings of this case do represent a contribution to theory in a specific study where fine-grained studies of 'up close observations' are proposed for further research.

This study suggests that focussing on shared leadership as a group level phenomenon using a systems psychodynamic perspective demands a fine attention to the emerging relational dynamics in order to effectively reveal the underlying unconscious forces at work. It is not enough to observe how two leaders may or may not acknowledge one another since from a systems psychodynamic perspective this must be understood as saying something about the group as a whole not just about these individuals. Such insights are not currently possible with the entity-based approach to studying shared leadership.

(ii) Shared leadership in New Product Development teams

The conceptual framework proposed by Cox et al. (2003) for how shared leadership might be developed in New Product Development teams includes a proposition related to vertical leader behaviours and the emergence of shared leadership. One of the propositions outlined in their study is:

Proposition: 'Judicious vertical leader support of the team is positively associated with the development and display of shared leadership in the team'

(Cox et al., 2003, p.59)

When describing what is meant by judicious 'leader support' the authors suggest that in 'shared leadership contexts, the challenge of leadership support involves negotiating a gap-filling balance between abdication at one extreme and disempowering seizure of control at the other'. Such approaches would usually frame research methods that test the hypothesis - through some kind of survey

questionnaire structured to include line items that measure some operationalized dimensions of 'leader support'.

While the findings of this case study cannot contribute in that way, they do illustrate both at the descriptive data level and the explanatory and interpretive analysis levels the group dynamics that can be associated with 'gap filling' of this kind. For example, the descriptive analysis of when the Managing Director agrees to take on the final formulation of the strategic priorities only to find the team fall silent and the Managing Director to feel set up – provides a rich description of what can happen when formal leaders attempt to 'gap fill'. He was pleased to take on the responsibility – 'thank you for authorising me PMG!' only to find that his presentation was received in silence after which he felt 'set up'. Reported in the case are the reflections of the Managing Director in a one to one meeting in late 2009 near the end of my work with the team. He reflected on how he felt the strong wish from the team that he was always 'on their backs' but he resisted this because he felt it was not the right thing to do. This illustrates the Managing Director's reflections on 'leader support' as a group level phenomenon – he felt the group as a whole was pulling him into taking up his authority as a vertical leader in a way that would ultimately be unhelpful. This is at a time when the team is struggling with the realisation that it is seemingly unable to make a decision and implement any of the initiatives.

At one of the Programme Management Group meetings following the off-site day the Managing Director asks directly how people experience him when he asks

team members to do something. He is, in these exchanges, exploring openly this notion of 'leader support' by asking how he is experienced.

The approaches to this issue from an entity-based perspective on shared leadership theory and the findings of this study of shared leadership are very different. The approach behind entity-based studies is to discover a set of causal relationships between factors that might help in getting the balance of support right. The hope is to produce a form of knowledge that can then be standardized and elaborated as a normative behaviour to be deployed with skill by any leader hoping to successfully implement shared leadership. This study suggests that the complexity of the relational dynamics in a team is such that instead of applying an idealized form of skilled behaviour a leader instead needs to pay attention to the unique set of unconscious group dynamics that will be at play. In this study, the Managing Director's experience of being 'pulled' to take up his role in a more traditional way is not easily understood as the sum of individual behaviours. The group dynamic is expressed through individuals but cannot be understood as merely the sum of what individuals do. Entity-based approaches cannot conceptualise group level dynamics understood in this way – leaders hoping to implement shared leadership would more likely enjoy success if they are able to divine the nature of these group dynamics and not rely on a set of 'tips' for implementing shared leadership which is more likely to be distilled from entity-based studies.

Such rich descriptions of the complexity involved in leadership processes understood at the group level offer a strong alternative to traditional approaches and expose their limitations. It is in this way that my study can contribute theoretical depth to leadership studies.

(iii) The Group Exchange Structure model (Seibert et al., 2003), one of the conceptual frameworks considered in the literature review, uses Leader-Member exchange (LMX) theory as a theoretical base for distinguishing how different kinds of relationships will produce potentially different forms of support in a team. When leadership is shared the degree to which other team members are inclined to support other team members will be crucial.

Using three types of social relationship – balanced, generalized, and negative, various group structures emerge from those in which there is a general unity of social exchange since all members enjoy high quality generalized exchange relationships in which reciprocation is not required immediately, contrasted with balanced exchange relationships in which reciprocation in exchange is expected immediately. Negative exchange relationships are unlikely to produce shared leadership as members pursue mainly self-interest or even seek to undermine other group members.

This study supports many of the theoretical insights of this approach – Seibert et al. theorize that scapegoating, blocking and competition are all possible outcomes of groups with structures reflecting negative social exchange relationships. For

example, in this study, the way in which the three 'junior' Executive Directors were experienced by the Marketing Director as blocking the implementation of initiatives or how the senior team scapegoated the manager of the internal recruitment department – something the team accepted as a valid interpretation of their behaviour - represent ways in which group structure is both constitutive of and constituted by relational dynamics in the team. However the ontological commitments of these researchers make it problematic for them to articulate research methods that could engage with the kind of group processes that could elucidate the kind of dynamics their model conceptualizes.

Shared leadership understood from this Group Exchange Structure model highlights what many managers already know anecdotally – that groups can form sub-groups and that they often compete and try to undermine one another. This much is reflected in this model. The authors of this model go on to give advice about what the formal leader can do to address these issues try to build 'generalized' social relationships in the team and gradually include the isolates. Such accounts reify the individual leader as a rational agent and underplay the importance of systemic unconscious group dynamics that this study suggests can play a significant role during an attempt to implement shared leadership. These dynamics will include groups and individuals outside the team. For example, the way the senior team struggled to integrate different streams of strategic work by framing them as an either / or choice was associated with conflict between the senior team and the project groups; or the way in which the managers were often denigrated by the senior team perhaps as a way of dealing with their dependency

on the managers. Both of these examples show the limitations of this model of Group Exchange Structure since it focuses only on dynamics within the team and relies on rational approaches to facilitate the emergence of shared leadership. This study suggests the potential power of group level group dynamics that are likely to be operating in such situations.

Even focussing within the team as the model suggests, the kinds of dynamic suggested by this study suggest rational strategies of influence will be of limited use. For example, how the projects were criticized for being out of control although senior team members who acted as sponsors were never challenged openly; or how decision-making became something that team members 'played at' in order perhaps to avoid conflict amongst team members.

All these examples suggests that rather than attempting to deploy rational influencing strategies leaders hoping to implement shared leadership should firstly consider the possibility that there are unconscious group level dynamics at play in any human group and that they as a leader are being unconsciously influenced in some way by such dynamics. This would then require them to monitor their own experience in role – in the same way that I was required to in my role of consultant-clinical fieldworker – as a means to decipher the group dynamics unfolding around them as the attempt to share leadership is undertaken.

Some summary considerations related to contribution to leadership theory

At the beginning of the literature review of chapter 2, some of the key debates in the leadership literature were considered. These centred around calls for a new leadership ontology (Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012; Drath et al., 2008,). This ontological debate was delineated by three related issues, one central one related to the way the self is theorized and two related issues – how relational dynamics can be understood and how process can be engaged with (see pages 26-27). Based on a theory of the self that construes the individual as fully embodied and relational (Miller, 1993a), a myriad description of individual and collective group experience becomes possible. The type of accounts presented in this study provides a more nuanced account of leadership as a group level process than is possible from the entity-based leadership models that dominate the literature – not only the shared leadership literature but the whole leadership literature.

It is only when the body is rehabilitated to the domain of social enquiry that such accounts are possible (Ladkin, 2010) – and this is only possible when this rehabilitation is structured within a conceptual framework that valorizes human emotion and emotionality in human collectives (Carr 1999).

Ambivalence toward the body has a long history. Knowledge in Western traditions is usually associated with what is known cognitively and our ability to be rational (Ladkin 2010). While this can be traced back to the Cartesian split between *res cogitans* versus *res extensa* there are earlier traces back to the Judeo-Christian

traditions in which the desires of the body were to be curtailed by the reasoning mind (Freeman, 2002). Such concerns manifest themselves in the early twentieth century when the birth of modern management theory coincided with a period when there was a great concern about the impulses of the human body in Victorian society (Styhre, 2003). As such Taylorism can also be seen as an attempt to regulate the human body through disciplines of industrial efficiency. Such approaches are consistent with a view of organizations as machines (Morgan, 1997).

Within the academic community such themes manifest within a commitment to what Schon (1983) described as Technical Rationality – the need to conduct social science using methods from the natural sciences in pursuit of universal truths. Thus the dominant leadership ontology based on an entity-based perspective (Drath et al, 2008) eschews the experience of the body and instead attempts to reduce human experience to its more cognitive elements. This study suggests that the cost of such reductionism is high in terms of what is left out, what is left unexplored.

For leaders hoping to implement shared leadership this study suggests that there is a high price to pay when team members do not see their experience as fully embodied individuals as a valid source of knowing how to act in a particular context. The team held on so strongly to a consistent narrative against the strategic projects but struggled to see any meaning in their strong feelings beyond an indication that something needed to be done about the projects. Individual

Executive Directors' resentment toward the Managing Director – insisting that he provide a more robust directive leadership was experienced as simply that – resentment – and could not be linked to personal and collective anxieties about adaptive work when leadership is shared. The relentless quality of negative affect toward the HR Director was understood as simply an indication of his lack of professionalism and could not be understood in relation to the growth of the company and the wresting of HR functionality from individual Executive Directors. Thinking and feeling could not be easily integrated in order to understand the potential unconscious dynamics that might be at play. Above all it was hard for individuals and the group as a whole to link their anxieties to the attempt to share leadership. The Managing Director was seen as a 'bad' leader when he didn't act as team members wanted.

By such accounts, this study confirms that the experience of anxiety, and its corollary – emotional distress – is central to human experience in groups and work. The patterns of systemic affect suggested shows how this anxiety can mobilise powerful defensive routines designed to reduce the emotional turbulence engendered by anxiety in ways that can be inimical to adaptive work. From the more dramatic directing of collective ire toward a colleague – the firing of the HR Director – to the more subtle cumulative consequences of not discussing feelings and experiences such as how team members felt about 'the centre' and a perceived regime of 'zero-tolerance, collective human emotionality is at the centre of leadership shared or otherwise. Although the group dynamics explored in this case are associated with an attempt to share leadership this does not imply that

such dynamics only occur when leadership is shared. However, a leader takes up their role, there will always be potentially powerful unconscious group dynamics at play as a team attempts to do adaptive work. This study shows the kinds of dynamics that can be at play when a leader attempts to implement a shared approach to leadership and this constitutes a range of contributions to the shared leadership literature.

Ultimately however, there is no contribution to the shared leadership literature that this study claims to make that doesn't apply equally to the broader leadership literature. In other words once the lens through which we look at leadership is expanded to the group level, to embrace group level phenomena, when it is expanded to include fully-embodied relational human subjects and not simply heads without bodies, then there is no need for a separate theory called shared leadership. The shared leadership literature represents an attempt to expand the construct without addressing the central issue of leadership ontology. As such, the shared leadership literature can be viewed as an outgrowth of a commitment to entities that pervades so much of the leadership literature.

Implications for practice

In my experience, entity-based approaches to leadership are as pervasive in the world of practice as they are in academia. The result has been that leadership development is understood largely as leader development in most organisations (Tate, 2009). Based on the findings of this study I will consider a number of implications for practice that challenge the hegemony of rationalist leadership

development practices that are part of this commitment to leader rather than leadership development.

This study suggests that when engaging in adaptive work, groups can be subject to powerful unconscious dynamics that can ultimately undermine the possibility of collective learning so essential for adaptive work (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997). This study also suggests that whatever leadership is, however it is conceptualised, these group dynamics are an ever present aspect of all human collectives. The dynamics will contrast from those elucidated in this single case study, but patterns of systemic affect, shaped by powerful unconscious group level dynamics, of the kind that this study elucidates will be present in every context where leadership takes place. This has important implications for practice.

One such implication, is that leaders should be supported in being prepared for such experiences. Leaders in organisations would therefore benefit from a perspective on leadership that encourages them to focus on emergent group dynamics in every context where they find themselves. Critical to this is the understanding that they are part of those dynamics and cannot hope to achieve independence from them. Unconscious group dynamics cannot be 'solved' or 'fixed'. The Managing Director in this case was frustrated that he was unable to work on the tasks – the agenda items of senior team meetings – and experience and respond to the unfolding dynamics in the room. Before the off-site meeting he spoke about being a convert to needing to be able to speak about issues that were unspoken as a way of surfacing some of the dynamics that he felt were influencing

the team. He struggled to link the impact of his 'zero-tolerance' of non-compliance on others and felt confused when it was both resented on some occasions but brought relief on others. He felt that team members wanted him to be more directive but when he was directive in terms of his presentation of the priorities there was an uncomfortable silence. The competition between the Executive Directors exposed in the data from internal interviews suggested that the negative affect directed toward the Attraction project team that conducted the interviews might have an irrational aspect. However, the Managing Director struggled to work with such material even when presented in such a compelling way.

The perspective on leadership within an organisation is often formally embedded by Human Resources professionals and deployed through a variety of processes such as talent management, performance appraisal, and survey methods such as 360 degree questionnaires. Such methods present opportunities to shape managers understanding of the nature of leadership practices. If these communications are informed strongly by entity-based perspectives on leadership they are likely to fall short of preparing managers for the kinds of experiences that this study suggests they will encounter.

Entity-based leadership development practices usually emphasise a normative set of desired behaviours clustered around a list of several selected competencies. Individuals are measured against these descriptions of idealised behaviour and a gap established. It is not unusual for a 360 degree questionnaire designed this way to automatically generate a set of generic developmental activities which

accompany the printed report to help the manager fill the gap between the desired behaviour and the managers current behaviour as indicated by the evaluation of peers, subordinates and their line manager.

Such instruments reflect a view that human behaviour is a function of individual psychologies – an entity approach. They also reflect the objectivist assumptions that underpin predominant paradigm in leadership research – that psychological qualities related to effective performance are discrete and stable, identifiable and applicable to wide populations (Bolden and Gosling, 2006). This focus on individual psychologies matches the conditions of employment in which individuals are measured, rewarded and held accountable for their actions as individuals and little emphasis if any is given to the notion that individual behaviour could be a product of unconscious group dynamics. Competency is an individual construct and reinforces entity-based views of leadership (Hollenbeck, Mccalljr and Silzer 2006). The possibility that an individual manager's performance could be a function both of personal capabilities *and* group dynamics – for example, are almost inconceivable in most organisations. The scapegoating of the manager of internal recruitment was relentless at times. Her job was to identify good potential sales consultants for the business. When these sales consultants performed poorly, she was an easy target. Rather than blame performance on the manager of the team, it was easier for the manager to say the consultant was of poor quality in the first place. That the resulting scapegoating might actually affect the capacity of the manager of internal recruitment to work competently was inadmissible as an idea. Managers need to be exposed to the very

real possibility that they will either participate in such scapegoating without awareness or in turn be scapegoated by others. Such issues cannot be addressed in entity-based leadership programmes that focus on performance as a function of the individual behaviour.

Such programmes usually attempt to elucidate a gap between desired and current behaviour which individuals are then expected to close through skills training or remedial coaching. Such interventions are unlikely to assist a manager in being prepared for leadership when leadership is associated as this study indicates with unconscious group level dynamics.

In order to help managers develop their capacity to detect and work with group level dynamics that can undermine adaptive work, it is essential that they are exposed to opportunities to explore the kinds of projections they are likely to encounter in group settings. Introducing the idea that a group can mobilise unconscious behaviour in an individual is challenging (Miller, 1989; Rice, 1965). What kinds of experiences in groups are they more likely to notice and what are they likely to miss? What kinds of feelings do they 'pick up' are what kinds of feelings are they less likely to notice? This requires the willingness to encounter a wide range of potentially disturbing personal material some of which may relate to early developmental experiences. Team members found the notion that they were playing the role of the 'critical parent' when communicating with managers very challenging. The Managing Director struggled to see how his way of communicating 'zero-tolerance' was experienced by others. It is not enough to

consider what was intended behind such communication. Leaders must also be willing to explore the kinds of projections they get when acting in role (Shapiro, 2001). Leadership development activities that explore such possibilities are well established within the field of systems psychodynamics (Triest, 1999) but are not widely deployed. Such a developmental process is usually fostered over a period of years and it cannot be the focus of a brief training intervention. Issues of confidentiality and privacy become important and may require the recalibrating of the relationship between Human Resources professionals and managers they seek to develop in order to ensure a sufficient degree of confidentiality to allow learning to occur.

Entity-based approaches do not acknowledge the existence of group level irrational forces and are not able to prepare managers for such experiences. Leadership development opportunities that are not prescribed in advance by a set of behavioural competencies allow instead for the possibility of learning by discovery. Such an approach may be best circumscribed by an experiential learning agenda in which unconscious aspects of group functioning in simulated environments can be used to encourage an understanding of the more irrational aspects of group life and how they relate to personal identity (Petriglieri, 2011).

The limitations of this study

Having considered the implications for practice it is important to consider the limitations of this study. While it is a study of a single team one of the strengths of this study is the ordinariness of this team and context. In my experience many

senior leaders aspire to create a senior team environment in which the team as a whole takes up the role of running the organisation. This team was not unusual either in its make up or in its difficulties – the adaptive challenges they faced are common across many industries. So although the case is singular and unique, this is not the basis of an argument to say that it is therefore irrelevant; although the interpretive theory developed from the descriptive data and explanatory analysis is particular to this study, the underlying patterns are recognisable and plausible in many other contexts. The dynamics of scapegoating, for example, are recognisable to all managers. The findings of this study extend theory, not only in the domain of shared leadership, but also contribute to wider issues in the broader leadership literature.

However, by limiting the research to the members of the senior team the opportunity to collect important data from the next level of managers, many of whom were closely involved in the shared leadership activities would have enriched the data. I also feel that a weakness in the analysis is that there were not enough opportunities for testing out some of the hypotheses that I have subsequently developed as part of this study. The interpretive analyses and 28 working hypotheses and 5 meta-level statements represent an impressive array of interpretive theory derived from the case. However, they belie the actual challenges of the consulting experience in which at times I felt I lost my role and felt incompetent. This writing has been an experience of ‘if only I had told them that’ or ‘that would have been a great interpretation to offer them’. This touches on a related issue of how to deal with the balance between the consultant and the

clinical fieldworker role. While I feel I was at times robust in my challenge to this team there were also times when I made the choice not to push too hard for fear I would be asked to leave and this would compromise my research agenda. It is possible that instead of working with the team in January 2009 I would have told them that I felt they were really not able to meet the challenges of working together as a team. I have worked with many teams and while I maintain this team is not unusual, at times it seemed that they had little chance of really working effectively. I did not set out to do a case study of a failed attempt to implement shared leadership but that's what it became. Hence I would be very keen to supplement this research with further studies of this kind.

I have wondered sometimes if this is simply the story of a leader who wanted to build a consensus culture but was simply unable to do so. However, it was the unsolicited way in which the Managing Director spoke explicitly about his wish that the team as a whole provide leadership and the use of the term 'shared accountability' that convinced me that this represented a strong potential contribution not only to the shared leadership literature but to the wider literature. The length, the depth, quality as well as the volume of data collected has made this an extraordinary journey of personal learning both as a researcher and a consultant.

Future research

This study has highlighted the need to address the issue of leadership ontology on which research is based. While it has explored the potential limitations of social

constructionist accounts of leadership, it has mainly focussed on the hegemony of objectivist research paradigms and attempts to highlight some of the weaknesses of such approaches. At the same, this study offers an approach to studying leadership that transcends the limitations of individualist accounts. It is an approach that I believe is a more faithful account of empirical reality than can be achieved through survey methods that focus on leadership as something individuals do rather than something that a group does through its members. It offers a research methodology that provides a disciplined framework from which aspects of reality - of leading in organisations - can be revealed through experiencing rather than from counting. This study places new demands on researchers to not only pay attention to constructs and how they can be operationalised and measured, but to the philosophical ground on which their knowledge claims are based. It outlines field research methods that allow a researcher to turn toward their own subjectivity in the search for objectivity using the disciplines of the managing the self-in-role that form the basis of clinical fieldwork (Lawrence, 1979).

There are important implications in terms of future research for those that would claim to do clinical fieldwork. The implications for how researchers are trained are considerable but there are also the dangers of poorly constructed studies that lack rigour and discipline. Throughout my literature review I remained impressed by the quality of thinking and the scholarly rigour that entity-based researchers applied to their work. Attention to issues of conceptualisation, clarity of definition and causality can and should have their equivalents within the interpretive domain and much can be learnt from entity-based methods. Just because I philosophically

am not predisposed to seeing the world through the lens of the objectivist paradigm does not mean that I am not interested in objectivity. Part of my motivation for undertaking this study is based on a concern that the systems psychodynamic perspective is not only remote but also insular. This study has gone some small way to demonstrating the richness of the systems psychodynamic conceptual framework but in terms of future research there is much that can be learnt from other research disciplines; a dialogue between methodologies may be challenging but it is still necessary.

My learning

In August 2011, I was invited to present at a doctoral consortium at the Academy of Management in Boston, under the title of, 'In Balancing Practice Challenges & Academic Standards in Doctoral Studies'. It was an opportunity to reflect on what I had learnt as a result of working on this thesis. I made three main points.

Firstly I have learnt that good research makes me a better consultant. The disciplines of keeping comprehensive field notes, systematically recording observational notes, writing these up into theoretical notes on a regular basis, and tracking the evolution of my thinking, represented a profound shift in the quality of my work as a consultant.

Secondly, the way in which the disciplines of scholarly practice have required me to be explicit about my models of intervention has helped me to stave off the dangers of fossilization of thinking and approach that seems to come with

successes, with failures and time. I have been forced to learn so much about the way I see the world, my biases, my intentions.

Thirdly, I also learnt that there were times when I compromised on being a good consultant because I was afraid of losing the opportunity to do research and that there are real challenges to doing both which can be transcended but only with considerable skill – skills which I did not necessarily have at the outset but which I have acquired in a limited way as a result of having conducted this study.

I have often replayed in my mind the final closing meeting I had with the senior team – and wished that I had said different things based on what I feel this thesis has helped me to know that I didn't see at the time. The gap between what I did say and what I now wish I had said perhaps constitutes much of what I have learnt. While I have worked in many organizations with many senior teams, the privilege of having such access to a remarkable group of ordinary – in the very best sense of that word – people who made up the senior team of Recco have afforded me the most comprehensive and transformational learning experience of my life. It has taught me to be more humble in my judgments and less certain. It has taught me that organizational life is infinitely complex and challenging for those that spend their lives in them and that it takes great courage to continue to struggle against the very human frailties that can so easily come to the fore when trying to work collectively on tasks that are personally valuable.

I also guess that much of what I have learnt from the writing of this thesis is yet to be revealed since it seems a truism in life that when it comes to the most important

things, it's hard to be aware of learning when it is happening. I turn finally to some conclusions and closing remarks.

Conclusions

Although there are dangers to claiming that we are living in an age of rapid change – the narrative about constant change is a mainstay of managerial rhetoric (Eccles and Nohria, 1992) – there are many reasons to believe that this is so.

Globalisation, the spread of social media and new technologies, deregulation of markets and competition, population migrations, and growth and the ecological and environmental challenges we face are just some of the issues that together seem to convey a sense of constant and perhaps ever more rapid change. To this extent the exhortations of the writers writing about shared leadership claiming that it is the new leadership model for such a changing world certainly has an appeal to it. This thesis did not set out to prove them wrong, but in some way to moderate their enthusiasm and to suggest that if indeed the world is becoming more complex, then a view of leadership that reflects that complexity is needed. In the face of such complexity, entity-based views of leadership appear inadequate and reductionist. With the challenges this new complex world presents – largely adaptive in nature – addressing these challenge will demand of leaders that they understand not only how they can influence individuals but about the powerful unconscious forces that move human collectives and of which they are also a part. This study set out in a limited way to highlight just what such a view of leadership might entail.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Case Description - RECCO

History

Founded in 1980 by two business partners – one male one female, who gave their surnames to the company, Recco grew quickly. While this growth was not exceptional at this time since the industry was rapidly developing and there was considerable growth in the market, many small recruiting firms did not achieve the success of Recco. The firm developed a reputation for high standards of staff training, quality and service delivery. When in 2000 the company was bought by a large German based holding company specialising in professional service, the business had grown considerably – employing 370 consultants and with annual turnover of £100m.

The company grew each year by between 15-20% in revenue terms up to 2005. However by 2006 targets were not being achieved and represented a dip in performance relative to the main competitors in the market.

The company provided recruitment services in a number of sectors including: banking, financial services, oil and gas, accountancy, legal services, IT, marketing and communications, project and programme management and procurement and supply chain.

Ownership

The international holding company that bought Recco in 2000 had 21 companies in its portfolio with revenues in 2005 of \$2.7bn. It's stock price on the NYSE in that year rose from \$17 to \$26; it's stock was held by pension funds and there was pressure to provide year on year growth of 15%. Recco was the biggest company in the portfolio of the holding company providing 22% of overall contribution to profit. The Managing Director of Recco, attended board meetings twice a year at the international head office of the holding company based in Germany. One or two other members of the senior team of Recco would also attend these two or three day meetings. The descriptions of these trips usually included reference to how 'laid back' the German shareholders were and that even when the forecasted sales were not delivered that there was a lot of understanding expressed by the Chairman and other board members. The Managing Director of Recco was largely given a free hand to run the company as he wished and there was little or no 'interference' from the shareholders.

Culture

The term 'culture' or 'internal culture' was often used at Recco. – it was a source of pride. It considered itself a 'values driven' organisation and colourful starburst stickers declaring these values: 'teamwork', 'innovation', 'professional', 'excellence' and 'performance' were visible all over the offices of Recco in the company's head office in central London. Most significant in terms of shared leadership is Recco's industry reputation as a place where teamwork was considered central – even the

compensation arrangement whereby sales consultants were not paid on the basis of their individual achievement but on the overall team performance. The team manager's bonus was similarly fixed to the performance of the team.

The company won training and quality improvement awards. However, a more nuanced account of staff attitudes comes from the Employee Survey of late 2005. The lowest scores in terms of agreement came from the items, 'management deals with poor performance', and 'I know what my business unit or department's goals are' and 'the appraisal process inspires me to achieve'. The company response to the first issue of performance management was to run courses in performance management. Managers were also encouraged to set clearer billing targets for consultants. A constant refrain from senior team members at this time was about the difficulty in attracting consultants – sales staff – into the company as well as individuals with the potential to become managers and climb the ladder. A slide from a 2006 'roadshow' reads,

'Key Challenges: Hiring for 2006. Not growing as forecast. Difficult balance between quantity and quality. What can we do to increase the flow of applicants? Answer: Additional resources to Internal Recruitment and sourcing directly from the internet'.

The business

A key financial indicator is 'temp margin' which is the amount of money made from the placement of one temporary worker with a client. These temporary workers are referred to as 'temps' or as candidates – the task of the organisation was to place good candidates with high profile clients. Client companies from a range of industries would place a request for a candidate with a number of recruitment companies simultaneously thus creating a strongly competitive environment. Competition for good candidates is therefore fierce across the industry but also within companies as different divisions compete for the best CVs. Another form of recruitment work is related to permanent positions – sourcing candidates to fill permanent positions would garner a commission fee often calculated as a percentage of one year's salary for the filled position. This form of permanent recruiting is often referred to as 'perm'. Recco was involved in perm but not on a systematic basis – temp consultants would often take perm opportunities that arose and this was not unusual across the industry. The issue then became one of quality – whether a temp consultant would have any credibility with a client who might also be talking to other recruitment companies who had not only specialist perm consultants but also specialists in their field of activity.

White boards with the names of clients and the sales made to them through successful placements were on display in most offices across the business. In large open plan offices with dozens of consultants sitting in close proximity these boards often represented the current sales of a particular team. With several boards in

plain view in each large office, the intention was to provide a competitive atmosphere to spur teams and individual consultants to higher performance.

Structure

In 2002 the structure consisted of 150 managers in an organisation with 2000 staff across 30 regional offices across the UK and Europe. The business was structured around small teams that specialize in particular sectors such as Legal, Finance, Oil and Gas and Technology. In many cases there were teams of 3 – a manager and two consultants and in at least a dozen cases, teams of one consultant and a manager. The model was an entrepreneurial one in which managers were given the task of growing their businesses which would mean larger teams. Managers who managed to build their businesses to a certain level – usually £1m of monthly revenue would be promoted to ‘senior manager’. If their business continued to grow then they may be appointed as Associate Directors. The structure was not always clear since some senior managers reported to Associate Directors and some reported directly to the most senior managers in the business – the four Executive Directors. The Executive Directors were also known as ‘heads of business’ since they had direct P&L responsibility for their areas. They in turn reported into the Managing Director appointed by the Board of the German holding company. So overall there were five layers to the organisation – the Managing Director at the top, four Executive Directors, and then Associate Directors, senior managers, managers, and consultants. In 2008 an additional layer was added to the non-managerial employee structure – senior consultants were

consultants who consistently billed more than £350,000 in sales per month. Many of these consultants did not aspire to be managers.

There were a number of issues related to this structure that were constantly discussed. One issue related to whether managers should be 'billing managers' or not. At Recco, most managers did not actively sell or place candidates with clients. The 150 managers were thus not contributing directly to sales. A second issue related to 'accountability' – were managers willing to take responsibility for their sales targets and be held accountable for their results. A related issue was the organisational culture – whether managers were able to manage their consultants since turnover was so high that to lose 'good billers' was to jeopardise the revenue generating capacity of a team and this would have a direct and negative impact on the managers bonus. The Executive Directors at the top of the business were paid according to a long term incentive plan which was largely performance based and related mainly to their own areas.

Until the middle of 2006, there was no senior team. Instead there were meetings to which all Associate Directors and Executive Directors were invited. This group consisted of 18 members and addressed operational issues. After the formation of the senior team in July this Associate Director meeting became the 'Ops meeting' where such issues continued to be discussed by senior managers and Associate Directors. There were four Executive Director positions: Executive Oil and Gas, Executive Director Legal Services, Executive Director Accounting and Finance and Executive Director Technology. Until the beginning of 2009 the position of

Executive Director Accounting and Finance was vacant. Having been recruited in mid 2008, the company had to wait six months for the new hire to take up her role.

Human Resources - employees

Most staff members were in their mid-20s to early 30s. There was a graduates' scheme that employed 20 recent graduates every year. An issue often discussed was whether it was better to employ experienced staff or to bring in young bright people who despite a dearth of experience would be able to learn quickly and become good revenue earners. The composition of the staff was a balanced one in terms of gender with women represented strongly in senior positions as well. The turnover of staff was 48% (43% for managers) on average against an industry average of 30%. Career paths and competitive salary levels were considered an important part of a retention strategy.

The company received 10,000 CVs annually from people hoping to join the company. In order to process these CVs and to select the best staff from these candidates a small internal recruitment team consisting of 3 consultants and a manager was created. A member of the internal recruitment team conducted a competency-based telephone interview following a first round of sifting of CVs. Successful candidates would then go through two more interviews with managers. A final step included a 'drink-up' at the pub with potential team members to see if the person would fit in. This last step was seen as crucial to the final recruitment decision. Managers received some training in how to conduct these interviews.

Until late 2005 the human resources function was decentralised and was managed by each of the Executive Directors as they saw fit. In December 2005 the company recruited its first Human Resources Director who would be responsible for a wide range of issues related to employees including the internal recruitment process, the design of career paths, managers bonus scheme and management training and development.

Marketing and Communications

In early 2006 Recco advertised for its first Marketing Director. The first Director recruited attended the first senior team meeting in July 2006 but then resigned. It wasn't until January 2007 that the next Marketing Director, was finally recruited. Up until 2006 there was no corporate marketing function. The web page was designed and run by an external company. Individual Executive Directors placed all advertisements with little co-ordination with other parts of the business.

Most contact with clients was through personal contacts and telephone. There was no systematic approach to the external world in terms of branding. The concept of branding and the development of a professional approach to marketing and communications started with the recruitment of the new Marketing Director.

Technology

Technology is essential to the recruitment business. One process involves the registering of potential candidates that could be placed with client companies

looking for staff. Having a database that has the functionality to provide a range of information is essential. For this to work it relies on consultants taking the time to fill in the information of a candidate so that it can be used for future possibilities.

An essential feature of such a database is that it can be used to identify how a candidate might be suitable for a range of jobs that might appear across a number of sectors. Recco's database contained hundreds of thousands of candidate profiles that were incomplete and not up to date. In addition the functionality of the database did not allow for the kinds of flexibility that the business required as it evolved. All new consultants received training on the main database technology.

Another essential role which technology plays in the recruitment business is the payment of temporary workers – the client companies pay Recco and Recco pays the temporary staff and takes a percentage as profit. The timeliness and accuracy of this payment system is an essential feature of the business. These payments were managed by a separate though closely affiliated company. This company provided back-office support to other recruitment companies owned by the same German holding company.